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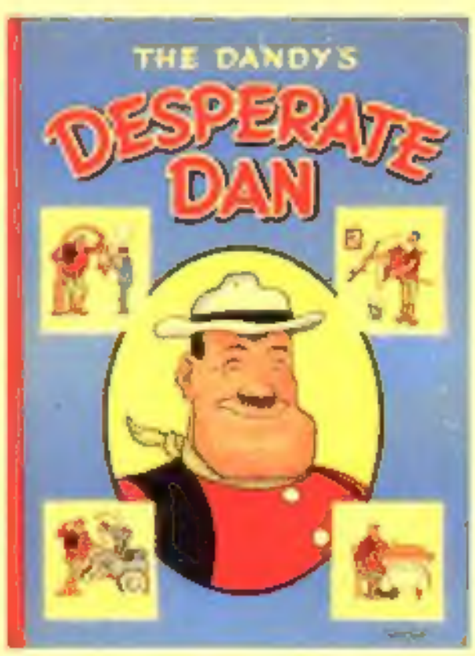

WELCOME TO

Crikey!

THE GREAT BRITISH COMICS MAGAZINE!

Glenn B Fleming *Publisher/Editor/Designer*

No doubt the cover was a give away. This is the last issue of *Crikey!*. Sadly, market forces have taken their toll on the financial aspects of putting this magazine together. The Borders debacle almost wiped us out in one fell swoop at the beginning of the year, but along with help from my brother Nigel, Tony and I managed to keep *Crikey!* afloat. Our printer, Peter Moore also helped us produce the last four issues, keeping his prices as low as he could. But now, *Crikey!* has reached the end...in paper form anyway. If we can get the orders, *Crikey!* could well end up being available on line. That is down to you, the reader–if that's something you would consider buying, then get in touch and let us know.

See Tony's piece below for developments on a new magazine available from Sequential Media via the web.

Meanwhile, I'd like to thank Tony Ingram who has been a real star throughout the past two years and I'm going to really miss his banter and input to the magazine. Thanks Tony–I couldn't have done it without you.

To all our contributors (with apologies to those whose work didn't make it into the pages of the mag) I'd like to say a big "cheers" for all your efforts–maybe your work will appear in another publication sometime. I hope so.

For me it's a sad day as there hasn't been a day since I took over this magazine that I've not worked on or thought about *Crikey!* and where it I wanted it to go and how I could achieve those aims.

Alas, it wasn't to be.

I've had a great time doing this magazine, met and worked with some great people. I just hope I can publish something in the future with those same people!

So that's it. The end of an era.

Take it easy and if you can't take it easy, take it any way you can!

It's been a blast!

Glenn

Tony Ingram *Editor/Writer*

Glenn has already given the reasons why this is the last issue of *Crikey!*, in this form at least, so there's little I can add to that except to say that looking at it as objectively as I can, I don't think we've really had a bad run. In these days when magazine sales are generally not what they once were, and at a time when everyone's hurting from the effects of a recession I remain unconvinced we're out of whatever the government says, sixteen issues for a niche magazine like ours is pretty respectable, I think. We never ran late (well, not by more than about a fortnight), which is more than most of the actual comics publishers can say. We never promised anything and failed to deliver (except those damned Daleks). And on the whole, I think that we put out a pretty good little mag, largely thanks to the help and support of some of the nicest and most talented people in the industry (in particular, special thanks to Pat Mills and Lew Stringer, both of whom went above and beyond the call of duty for us, but to many others too: you know who you are, guys, and I'm glad to have known you). And I'm not exaggerating when I say that *Crikey!* is probably the thing I'm most proud of in my life. Sad, I know, but it is-and I'm absurdly grateful to Glenn for letting me be a part of it.

Sequential Media is not totally out of the game yet. The *Crikey!* website (and it's associated chat forum) will remain up and running, and at the end of August you will-should you choose to do so-be able to purchase the first issue of our new magazine *Comics Unlimited* from the website exclusively as a PDF download (a snip at £2.99). There's a chance that, if the omens seem good, *Crikey!* too might continue in that format; again, it's up to you the readers to let us know if that's something you'd be interested in. We're certainly up for it if you are. Just keep on clicking on www.crikeyuk.co.uk and giving us your feedback and we'll see where we go from there. In the meantime, thanks to all of you who've supported us through thick and thin, and I hope you've had as much fun reading this stuff as we've had putting it together. As Glenn said, It's been a blast.

In the words of a great man: 'nuff said.

Tony Ingram

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Contributors this issue:
Glenn B Fleming, Tony Ingram, Steve Hooker, Alex Wiggan, Shaqui Le Vesconte, Ian Wheeler, Rab Smith, Andrew Edwards, Jamie Hailstone, Cranston McMillan & John Devaney.
Special thanks to: Nigel Fleming, Peter Moore and all our readers.

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In 1977, the launch of 2000AD *took the British comics world by storm, and one of the men leading the charge was Mick McMahon. He helped define the worlds of* Judge Dredd, *the* ABC Warriors, Slaine *and others in 2000AD's ever growing stable of characters, flirted briefly with* Doctor Who *(not literally, I hasten to add) and then followed many of his peers across the Atlantic (in an equally metaphorical sense) for awhile, but his work has never stood still. Finally, he's slowed down enough for* **Crikey!** *to catch up with him...*

MICK McMAHON

Crikey!: *Thanks for taking the time to talk to us. I'm guessing you still have a pretty busy schedule, so it's appreciated!*

Now, you've worked for a lot of companies on a lot of characters over the years, but how did you first get into comics? From my point of view, as a reader in the mid seventies, you just seemed to appear out of nowhere in 2000AD *when it started and were pretty much immediately one of its handful of core artists. I'm assuming Judge Dredd wasn't your first professional work?*

Mick: After I left art school I went to see the editor of *Battle Picture Library*, a very nice man called Mr Bensberg–I never did know his first name–and he thought my work showed promise but wasn't quite ready for his books. What he did do, however, was to send me around the corner to the Temple Art Agency, who also thought I had promise and took me on. I have never forgotten how much I owe to Mr Bensberg. Temple Art showed my work to an editor at DC Thomson who was in the process of creating a science fiction comic. Looking back, I assume that they had heard that IPC were creating a new SF comic and, as was usual at the time, thought that they'd better do one as well. I wrote and drew a couple of stories for him, but unfortunately he had a heart attack and the project was canned.

During this period I'd become a big fan of *Eerie* and *Creepy*, as they's started selling them in Smith's, and I was really taken with Paul Neary's stuff. Inspired, I wrote and drew a story about an old knight and werewolves and I took this in to Temple Art. They showed it to Pat Mills and he gave me a Judge Dredd script. So, no, Dredd wasn't my first professional work, but it didn't miss by much.

C: *You didn't create the design of* Judge Dredd, *if I recall correctly, but you did draw the first Dredd strip to be published, and went on to become probably the artist most associated with the character for some years. How did that come about?*

Mick: Dredd was created by Carlos Ezquerra. For some reason or other, I've never known what, he couldn't draw Dredd for *2000AD*. So they needed someone to draw the strip like Ezquerra. Out of the blue I got a big cardboard tube through the post from Temple, full of bits and pieces about Dredd. There was a script, six giant glossy photo prints of Carlos's original Dredd strip, and a letter saying that if I could draw it like

MCMAHON'S ART HAS CONSTANTLY EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS, AS THESE EXAMPLES SHOW. IN FACT, HIS ART FREQUENTLY SEEMS TO EVOLVE EVEN OVER THE COURSE OF A SINGLE JOB!

Carlos the job was mine. I'll never forget the last line of the letter, "It's all looking very promising!" So I had a go. I didn't think I'd got anywhere close to mimicking Carlos, who at that time was doing great work, but the people at *2000AD* seemed to think it was okay, so I was on my way.

C: *You were responsible for shaping a lot of Dredd's world and for the distinctive look of some of the strip's best loved characters (including the* Angel Gang*, if I remember right?). Where did the ideas come from? Did you have a lot of input into how Mega City and its inhabitants turned out, or was much of it specified in the scripts?*

Mick: I tried to stay faithful to Carlos's vision in terms of the general look of the thing, though obviously it did evolve quite a bit as I found my own style. Secondary characters and the look of the city were left to the artist, but specific characters or locales would be described in some detail in the scripts, sometimes accompanied by reference pics and notes. But there was still plenty of leeway, you didn't have to slavishly follow every direction. As long as the final result was okay there wouldn't be a problem.

C: *You also worked extensively on Pat Mills'* Ro-Busters *and* ABC Warriors. *The* Ro-Busters *series began in* Star-Lord *under someone else, but a lot of the* ABC Warriors' *world looks very much as though you had a hand in establishing the look and feel of it, you had a very distinctive style at that time which comes through quite strongly. You were alternating on episodes with several other artists including Kev O'Neill, but would I be right in thinking you were responsible for the look of some of the Warriors? The redesigned Hammerstein's feet in particular, seemed very reminiscent of your other work...*

Mick: Kev designed the look and feel of *ABC Warriors*, it was his and Pat's vision. I designed a couple of the *Warriors*, *Mongrol* and *General Blackblood*, but I had nothing to do with the look of any of the other characters. It was a lot of fun to draw, great looking characters and good scripts. It was a shame that Kev wasn't able to do more episodes, the two he did draw were really good.

C: *How did you end up doing that one story for* Doctor Who Monthly*, and why didn't you do more? It was quite controversial at the time (I think you were the first new artist to work on the strip since Dave Gibbons began it) but I rather liked it.*

Mick: All a bit prosaic really. At the time I was sharing a studio with Dave. He was going on holiday so they asked me fill in for a couple of episodes. Steve Parkhouse wrote a beautiful plot. It was the only time I've worked from a plot rather than a full script, and at the time I felt that the page layouts, the storytelling, was the best >

I'd done up to that point. A very poor likeness of Tom Baker though. It was also the only time my pencils were inked by someone else, Adolfo Buylla, who did a sterling job. All in all an enjoyable interlude.

C: *Your style seems to have changed quite a bit over the years-it changes quite radically in just a few years on* 2000AD, *with* Slaine *for instance looking very different to anything you'd done before. Was that a conscious decision, to keep on changing and developing? Many artists seem to simply find a signature style and stick to it.*

Mick: I seem to have three stages when drawing a strip. The first is where I'm struggling with getting what's on the page to marry up with whatever vague notion or gut feeling I have about what is 'right'. Then I have a happy period when I think I've figured it out. The final stage is where it all starts to become formulaic, lots of shortcuts and mannerisms, probably due to boredom. This means that when I start something new it is impossible to shoehorn it into the style of the preceeding work.

C: *You kind of vanished for a bit after* Slaine, *or so it seemed, and then in the nineties you joined the legion of British artists who moved into American comics. You've since done work for both the major US publishers, Marvel and DC. Is there much difference between the American way of doing things and working for a British title like* 2000AD *or* Toxic? *I've always somehow gotten the impression that it can be a strangely disconnected experience for a British creator working for an American company. I'd imagine you have more limited contact with the writers, for a start?*

Mick: After *Slaine* I was ill for several years. I had already made a start on the *Last American* with John and Alan, and they kindly waited for me to recover before the book went ahead. That was for *Epic* when Archie Goodwin was in charge, a lovely >

WHOOMPH!

man and a pleasure to work with. Actually I've not done that much work for American publishers. And I've not found any significant difference whoever I'm working for, it still comes down to me in a room at home drawing. I never spoke to Chuck Dixon about *Alien Legion* or *Batman*, but I hardly ever discussed *Dredd* scripts with John.

C: *Do you have a particular favourite strip or character you've worked on?*

Mick: *Decap Attack* for *Sonic the Comic*. It came out exactly as it appeared in my minds eye.

Happy days!

C: *Your comics work has been sporadic in recent years as you seem to have moved into other areas. What are you up to these days? And are there any upcoming projects we should be looking out for?*

Mick: I'm currently working on the last book of a *Tank Girl* series for Titan Books, not sure when it's coming out. For six or so years before that I worked for video game companies, mostly as a 3D environment artist but also doing concept work and a fair bit of 2D in-game art. I worked on a couple of *Hotwheels* racing games, a *Warhammer* 40K phone game, and I did six months on a music game that eventually became Rock Revolution, though I was long gone before it was finished, the publisher having decided that stylized characters were out, realistic was in, which of course meant the door for me, not being that way inclined. As this was my third redundancy, I decided that games were probably not the way forward. As to what's next, I've no idea. As usual.

C: *Finally, at he risk of sounding pessimistic: the British comics industry seems to have shrunk dramatically. What do you see as being its future, if indeed it has one?*

Mick: No need for pessimism, talented people are still writing and drawing comics in this country. The small press has a wonderful diversity of talent and ideas, book publishers are expanding their graphic novel lines. I also think that people have a greater visual awareness because of their exposure to video games and are therefore more open to the idea of reading illustrated stories. And *The Beano* is still going strong, so what's to worry about?

C: *Thanks again for taking the time to talk to us!* ●

THE Crikey! REVIEW

DC Comics 75th Anniversary Poster Book!

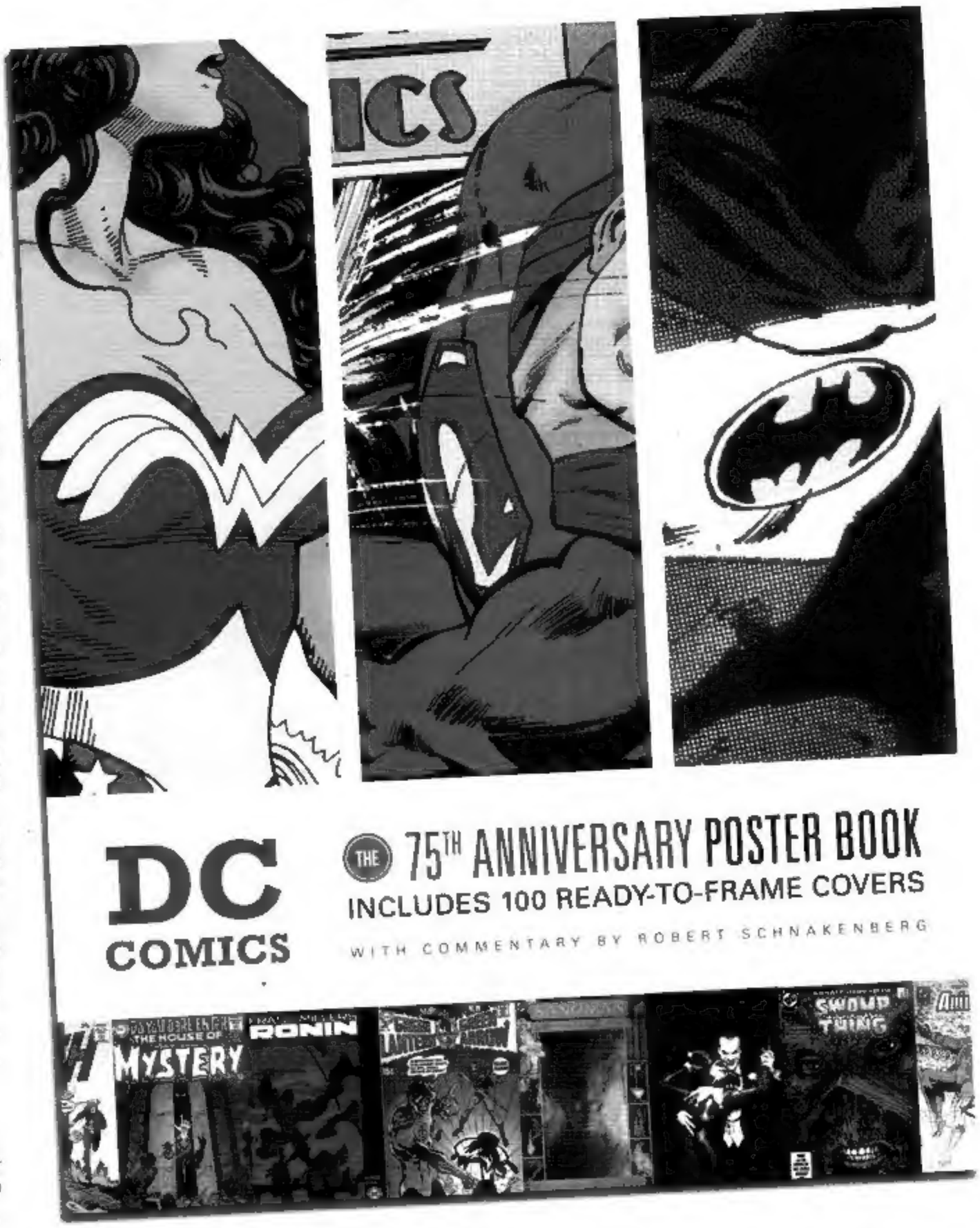
Celebrate the 75th anniversary of DC comics with 500 of the most recognized and famous comic covers in history!

This Anniversary Poster Book celebrates 75 years of the most famous comics in history by showcasing 500 of their most memorable covers–including 100 full-size posters, ready-to-frame! Arranged in chronological order, each poster is a milestone in DC comics history, and possibly in cultural history, too. From the first appearance of Superman in Action Comics #1–easily the most sought-after comic of all time–the introduction of iconic Batman, and firm favorites like Wonder Woman and Shazam, the unsettling The House of Mystery and Strange Adventures, or Mr. District Attorney, the relative innocence of Falling in Love, to more adult themes that addressed social concerns like Green Arrow's sidekick Speedy being a heroin addict, The Killing Joke, Preacher, Alan Moore's ground-breaking, taboo-shattering Swamp Thing, Ronin, Sandman, Angel and the Ape, 100 Bullets, each of the covers featured is a landmark in introducing recognizable characters to us, breaking free from the restraints of censorship, reflecting an era, questioning and highlighting social concerns, showing how artwork changes over the years, questioning the definition of human, or simply being the first comic you picked up to read.

On the reverse of each poster are images of related covers, concept sketches and commentary on these from some cover artists, capturing the rich legacy of DC Comics–the 'capes and tights' of Batman, Catwoman, et al, romance, westerns, horror, science-fiction, as well as the kooky and outright odd from Jerry Lewis and comedy legend Bob Hope, up to the best work from contemporary Vertigo artists, including V for Vendetta and Watchmen, making this a must-have book for any comic fan, artist, graphic illustrator, art and cultural historian.

Paul Levitz worked at DC Comics for over thirty years, most recently as publisher and president. Robert Schnakenberg writes extensively on science-fiction, and has written a number of comic books, as well as Quirk best-sellers Sci-Fi Baby Names, and Christopher Walken A-Z.

2010 marks the 75th anniversary of DC Comics and their continuing success!



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BRAND-NEW ADVENTURES OF RADIO'S NO.1 HIT!
MR. DISTRICT ATTORNEY
"Eyewitness!"
A THRILL PACKED STORY BEHIND A GRIM MANHUNT!
52 BIG PAGES
Falling in Love
IT LOOKS LIKE YOUR "EX" HASN'T GIVEN UP ON YOU YET!
WHAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF!
SHAZAM!
WITH ONE M
THE WORLD'S MIG
OHH NO! I'VE BEEN TRAPPED BY GIANT RATS!
Beware CREEPER
A TIME TO DIE!

BOOGIE BOOGIE

METAL MICKEY - THE LOOK-IN STRIP YOU NEVER SAW

BY SHAQUI LE VESCONTE

'Look-in' was launched in early 1971 as 'The Junior TVTimes Magazine', having evolved from twin concepts: a new television-based comic in the mould of 'TV Century 21', proposed by its editor Alan Fennell, and a television weekly for children headed by the popular ITV 'Magpie' series. Certainly, early issues show this combined concept more strongly, with regular 'Magpie' features and covers mixing with strips based on 'Timeslip', 'Please Sir!' and 'Freewheelers', among others.

As its popularity grew through the Seventies, 'Look-in' had a strong market niche as the junior television magazine. 'Countdown', later 'TV Action', was launched at around the same time as 'Look-in' but folded in 1973. Long-running 'TV Comic' took up some of the slack until publisher Polystyle attempted another rival, the short-lived 'Target', during 1978. But it was taken as read that if a popular ITV show was going to have a strip tie-in, it would appear in 'Look-in'. However, as the publication passed its tenth anniversary in early 1981, that was about to change...

Admittedly, 'Look-in' had a few previous hiccups. According to editor Colin Shelbourn, the makers of 'The Muppet Show' "...wouldn't sanction a strip of any sort at that time", even though a single black and white spec page was commissioned to try and sell the idea. American police show 'CHiPs' was stopped after two instalments because, as Colin Shelbourn again related, '...the English licensor agent hadn't cleared rights with the USA principals', leaving eight other completed colour pages by artist Arthur Ranson unpublished.

'Metal Mickey' made its debut on ITV in late 1980 and was an instant hit. With scripts by comedy writer Colin Bostock-Smith, the Saturday evening series concerned a robot who comes to life, and its adventures with the Wilberforce family it resides with. Playing second fiddle to Mickey, who dubs them all with nicknames, are Father (Michael Stainton), also known as 'Bootface', and perpetually baffled Mother Margery (Georgina Melville) or 'Dippy'. Inventor son Ken (Ashley Knight), aka 'Clever Clogs', was responsible for creating Metal Mickey, while Atomic Thunderbuster sweets put in the robot's mouth by pseudo-rebel brother Steve (Gary Shail) or 'Little Squirt', brought it to life. Sister Haley (Lucinda Bateson), aka 'Stringbean', and neighbour Janey (Lola Young) or 'Stumblebum' rounded out the younger cast. Granny (Irene Handl) was probably Mickey's best foil, dubbing her affectionately 'My Little Fruitbat'. She returned the favour, calling him 'Fluff'.

BOOGIE, BOOGIE
Metal Mickey
COMES TO
Look-in
You can't put the blinkers on Mickey, despite what our picture shows. That miracle of electronic and human wizardry is all set to 'steel' the scene on TV very soon — and he's coming to Look-in! That's right, the former dustbin who has risen to the heights in just a year begins a new set of adventures in an hilarious picture strip beginning next week. He's fun, he's cuddly (almost!) and he's all prepared to get up to the most comical capers that one outsized tin can could ever conceive.
So get down and boogie with Metal Mickey... starting in our next super issue.

A second series was quickly commissioned, airing from April 1981, and 'Look-in' successfully negotiated the rights for a strip to coincide with it. This was promoted in issue 1981/11, and on the original cover of issue 1981/12, as seen in the 'Look Out for Next Week's Look-In' - an indication of how close the strip came to being printed - with the readable legend 'Brand New Picture Strip Starts Today!'. However, the cover was changed just before publication to read 'He's A Pop Star, Too!', reference to what was originally an accompanying feature, focussing on Metal Mickey's new record.

As writer, the late Angus Allan recollected, in an interview on Alistair McGown's 'Look-in' tribute website, "My first scripts were turned down, then I re-wrote, but the Metal Mickey entrepreneur didn't like the drawings... "

Artist Bill Titcombe had attempted to make the stiff-limbed automaton more animated, but the creator/operator of the robot, John Edward, was very particular about how Metal Mickey should be characterised, and accurately visualised.

The existing six pages of artwork form a single-part story, and the first two instalments of an unfinished serial. Interviewed recently, Edward was somewhat scathing of the approach 'Look-in' took, both in writing and depiction.

The one-off, which may have been an initial 'pilot' strip as it was completed, was rewritten as a text story, 'A Weighty Problem for Metal Mickey', for the 'Look-in Television Annual' later that year. It involves the robot becoming attracted to a weighing machine while out to get more of his 'Atomic Thunderbuster' sweets. Edward commented, "The whole comic angle is totally wrong. Mickey is not attracted to other machines, he likes girls! Pink fleshy bits appeal to him. Only one episode of the original series had him 'fancying' a washing machine."

Edward continues, "My enduring memory of all the artwork that was

perpetrated at the time was it was dull, inaccurate, uninspired with wrong shapes, and badly drawn. My advice to artists is don't draw from memory - look with your eyes at the real thing or photographs and if you can't hack it, trace the shapes!"

Certainly, it can be seen all the pages are littered with amends, most written in pencil and erased, while another has a separate paper sheet overlay. The revisions throughout are mainly for Mickey himself, with almost all of the robot's heads having been corrected, or redrawn and pasted on. One frame shows Metal Mickey raising his arm in agreement - this has been pasted out altogether as the real robot couldn't do that, and some wit (possibly Titcombe himself) had pencilled 'armless enough ain't he!' at the bottom of the board. Another frame originally showed Mickey walking or running with articulated knees, something impossible for the stiff-legged robot, so in the reworked art he rolls or glides.

"I'm not asking for the impossible," Edward defended his position, but adding, "in retrospect, it may well have been - given that artists work to a budget, not because they need to get it 'right'."

Bill Titcombe commented about the ultimate cancelling of the strip, "The creator (of Metal Mickey) caused so many problems - nit picking here, there and everywhere - that Colin Shelbourn decided not to continue with the venture." And so issue 1981/12 had to give the apology "Sorry, all you Metal Mickey fans who were looking forward to the start of the picture strip we mentioned in last week's Look-In: owing to a last minute hitch, we can't bring Mickey's strip to you for the time being." Deprived of the new strip at late notice, 'Meet The Smurfs' was once again bumped up to two pages - as had happened with 'CHiPs' two years earlier - to fill the gap.

This was a shame, as the first serial shows tremendous promise, with Metal Mickey donning his cap and scarf to go and see the Prime Minister (at the time, Margaret Thatcher) to "...give her my advice on running the country", after one of Father's rants.

Despite the problems 'Look-in' had, D C Thomson were successful in getting a 'Metal Mickey' strip launched in their rival weekly, 'TV TOPS' the following year. Initially in black and white then in full colour, it was drawn by Edgar Hodges, who had already illustrated the 'Metal Mickey' annuals for publishers Stafford Pemberton, and would work on all the editions.

More care was definitely taken with drawing Metal Mickey for the 'TV TOPS' strip, as the depictions - while still Hodges' - are more considered and graphic than his more usual comic style. Even so, looking back at examples, Edward still had issues.

"The artwork isn't too bad, at least the basic shapes were accurate." he said, referring to just the robot, "Never once did the artist choose a close up or use his eyes which are the only means he has of expressing himself." More failings are pointed to with the writing. "The script is not Metal Mickey at all. His character is someone else's, no Mickey words were used except 'Boogie Boogie'."

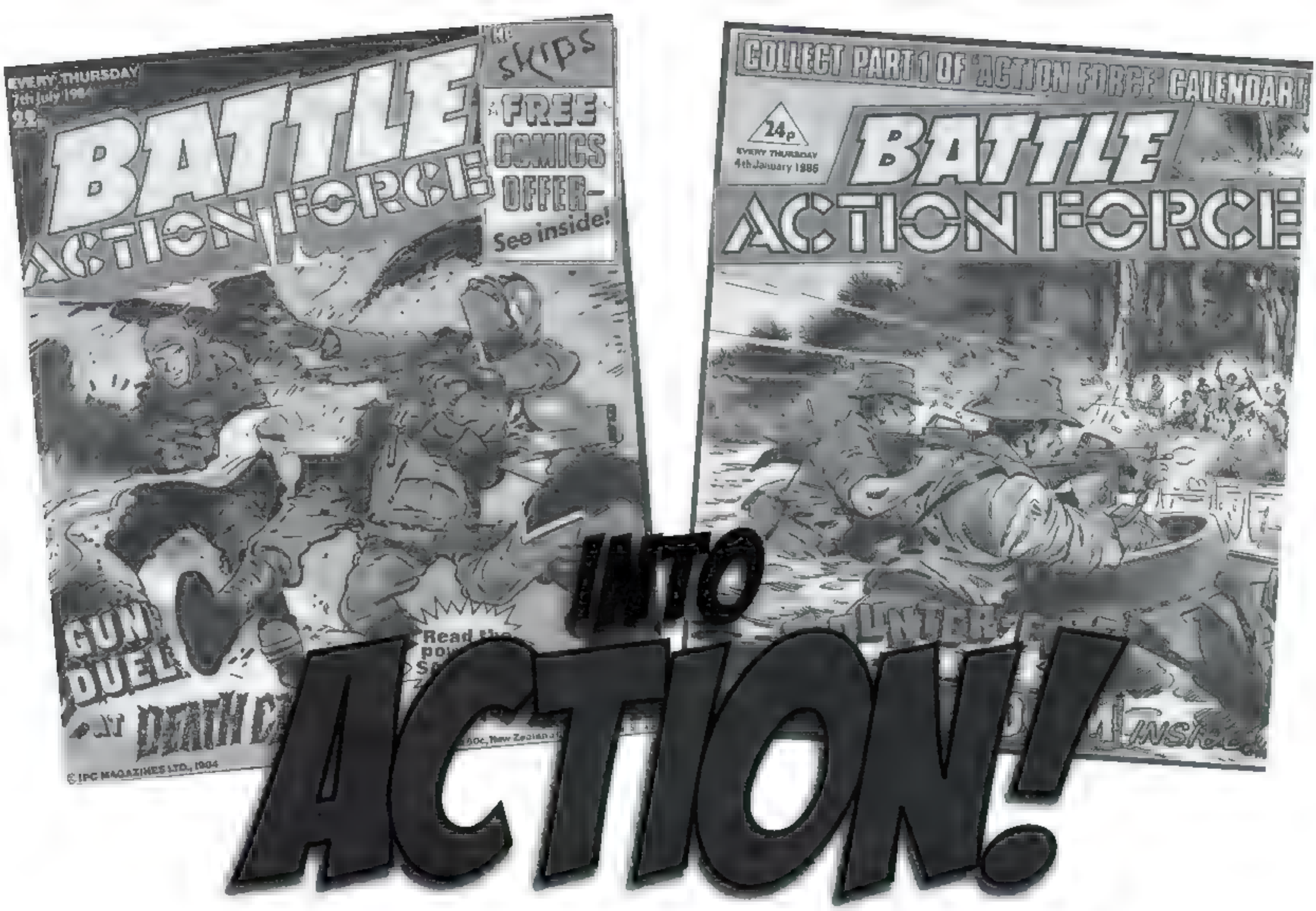
In light of how, in more recent years, branding is now passionately adhered to for quality, readers of this feature may have mixed feelings about John Edward's stance. Was he right or wrong? We leave the last words with him...

"I was only too grateful for Mickey's success at the time, and so rather than rejecting everything... I tried to explain how to put it to rights. Sadly, it was not enough to make quality suddenly appear!"

"You'd think there would be a happy balance, but in the area we are discussing, it plainly was not to be." ●

A SATURDAY MORNING AT THE WILBERFORCE BUNGALOW IS MADE PAINFUL BY CRIES OF ANGUISH
WHO HAS HIDDEN MY ATOMIC THUNDERBUSTERS? I AM HUNGRY! I AM WASTING AWAY!
OH FOR GOODNESS SAKE SOMEONE GIVE HIM POCKET MONEY TO GO AND BUY MORE
NO USE! I HAVE NO POCKETS!
HERE 'VE GOT TWENTY PENCE. TAKE IT AND CLEAR OFF!
I FEEL ZIPPY ALREADY! BOOGIE BOOGIE!
HEH HE'S GONE OFF ON HIS OWN!
CRUMBS I NEVER THOUGHT AFTER HIM
WHO WORRY? HE CAN DOA AFTER HIMSELF TH HE
GOOD MORNING IT BE DAY
YES INDEED SPLENDID WEATHER FOR THE TIME OF THE YEAR
TSK TSK WHAT BAD CLOTHES THE YOUNGER GENERATION WEARS THESE DAYS
INDEED I'LL TELL THEM SOMEO I GET BACK HOME, GRANDFATHER
THE SWEETSHOP IS IN THE LOCAL STATION FORECOURT BUT AS MICKEY APPROACHES
YOU ARE TWELVE STONE THREE AND YOU WILL HAVE NEWS OF A RELATIVE FROM ABROAD

With thanks to Alistair McGown, for letting me use the Angus Allan quote:
http://www.animus-web.demon.co.uk/sapphireandsteel/angus/angus1.html Additional thanks to Phil Clarke, Peter Hansen and Kim D. Stevens.

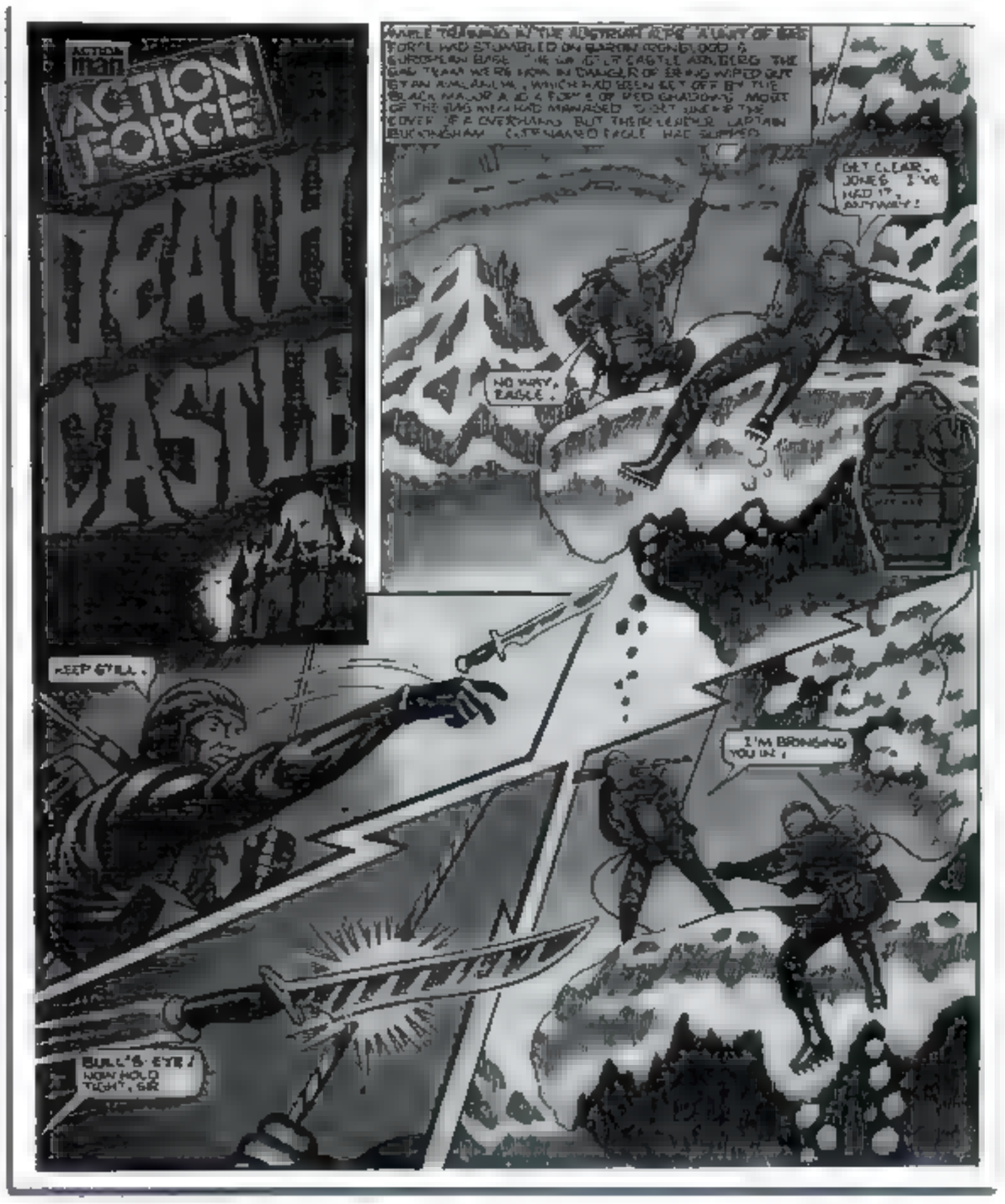


BY IAN WHEELER (WITH THANKS TO BARRIE TOMLINSON)

Comics based on successful toy ranges invariably please everyone. The toy manufacturer gets a weekly advert for their product range, the comic publisher gets increased publicity and sales and the kids get to read about their favourite characters and then act out the scenes for real with their action figures. Only mum and dad seem to suffer when it comes to the annual Christmas demand for the latest tank, aircraft or morphing robot.

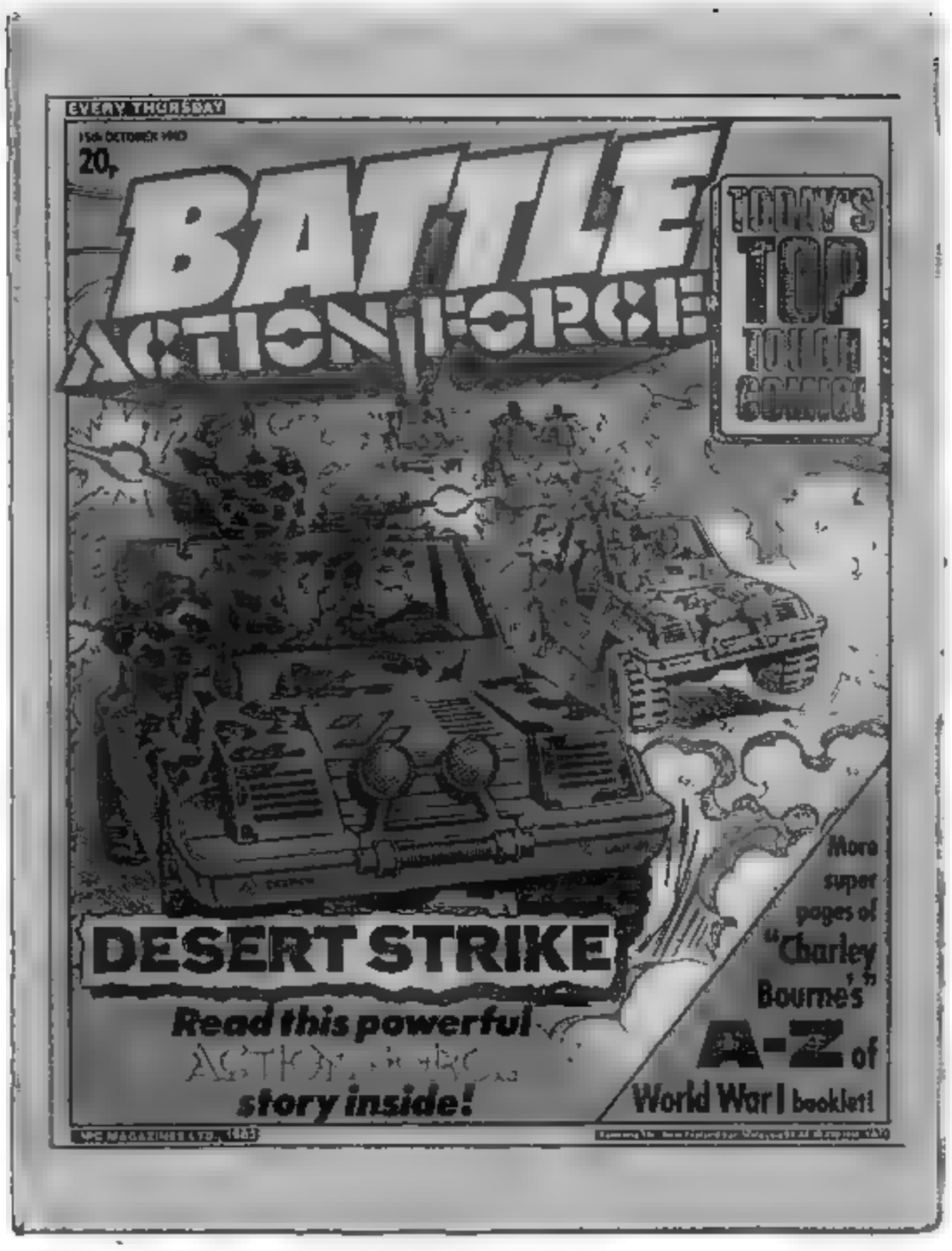
In the 1980s, British comics based on toy ranges included Marvel's *Transformers* and *Spider-man* and *Zoids* and IPC/Fleetway's *Mask* and *Supernaturals*. There were also several toy-inspired stories in *Eagle* including 'Robo Machines' and 'Manta Force.' One of the most popular and enduring toy-inspired comics, however, was *Battle Action Force*.

The Palitoy *Action Force* toys were a smaller version of the successful *Action Man* range, similar in scale to the highly prolific *Star Wars* figures. Released in 1982, the first wave of *Action Force* characters were based on real historical soldiers and toys in that first range included a British Royal Marine and a German Stormtrooper from World War Two. In 1983, a second generation of figures was released. *Action Force* was now a modern, crack military team consisting of four separate units. On land–SAS Force and Z Force. At sea–Q Force. In outer space–Space Force. Their enemies were the terrorist organisation the Red Shadows, lead by the evil Baron Ironblood and his deputy the Black Major. Many of the second wave figures were made from the same moulds as the original run (hence, the Red Shadows looked a little like the German Stormtroopers) and moulds were also borrowed from the American G.I. Joe range of toys, made by Hasbro.



IPC's *Battle* comic, which had been running under various titles since 1975, was the perfect home for an *Action Force* strip. In June 1983, the publication began a four part Action Force story which, although primarily a promotion for

the Action Force toy range, can in retrospect be seen as a pilot strip for what was to come. The story was a hit and five colourful Action Force mini-comics were subsequently given away free in various IPC comics including *Battle* itself, *Eagle* and *2000AD* (a trick which would be repeated years later when *Supernaturals* was launched). From October 1983, under the editorship of Terry Magee, *Action Force* joined *Battle* full time and the comic became... *Battle Action Force*.



The first issue of *Battle Action Force*, cover dated 8 October 1983, featured a SAS Force cover and had three Action Force stories within its pages, establishing the template for future issues. Interestingly, one of the *Action Force* strips, 'Operation Bloodhound', was in colour on the centre pages of the comic, with *Battle* regulars like 'Johnny Red' and 'Charley's War' consigned to black and white pages elsewhere. 'Operation Bloodhound' was drawn by Geoff Campion who would become an *Action Force* regular and, intriguingly, the first episode featured a picture of Baron Ironblood's unmasked face. For the majority of the character's run, we would only see him through the filter of his metal mask–strange given that the mask issued with the Ironblood action figure was removable, meaning that every child in the land knew what his face looked like! The other two AF stories in the premier issue were 'Desert Strike', illustrated by Vanyo, featuring Z Force, and a story simply entitled 'Q Force' drawn by Jim Watson. Both Vanyo and Watson would, like Campion, have long runs on the *Action Force* stories and would be joined later by other artistic talent including Jim Bleach, Ron Turner and John Cooper. Regular writers would include Gerry Day, Ken Owen and James Nicholas. The 'Q Force' story was a flashback adventure explaining the origins of the AF character known as 'Shark'. The supporting black and white *Action Force* strips would often take this format and the backstory of various AF characters would later be told. Incidentally, as there were four units of Action Force and only three story slots, each unit would be rested every so often so that a story related to another unit could be told.

James Nicholas recalls writing for *Battle Action Force* and other toy- >

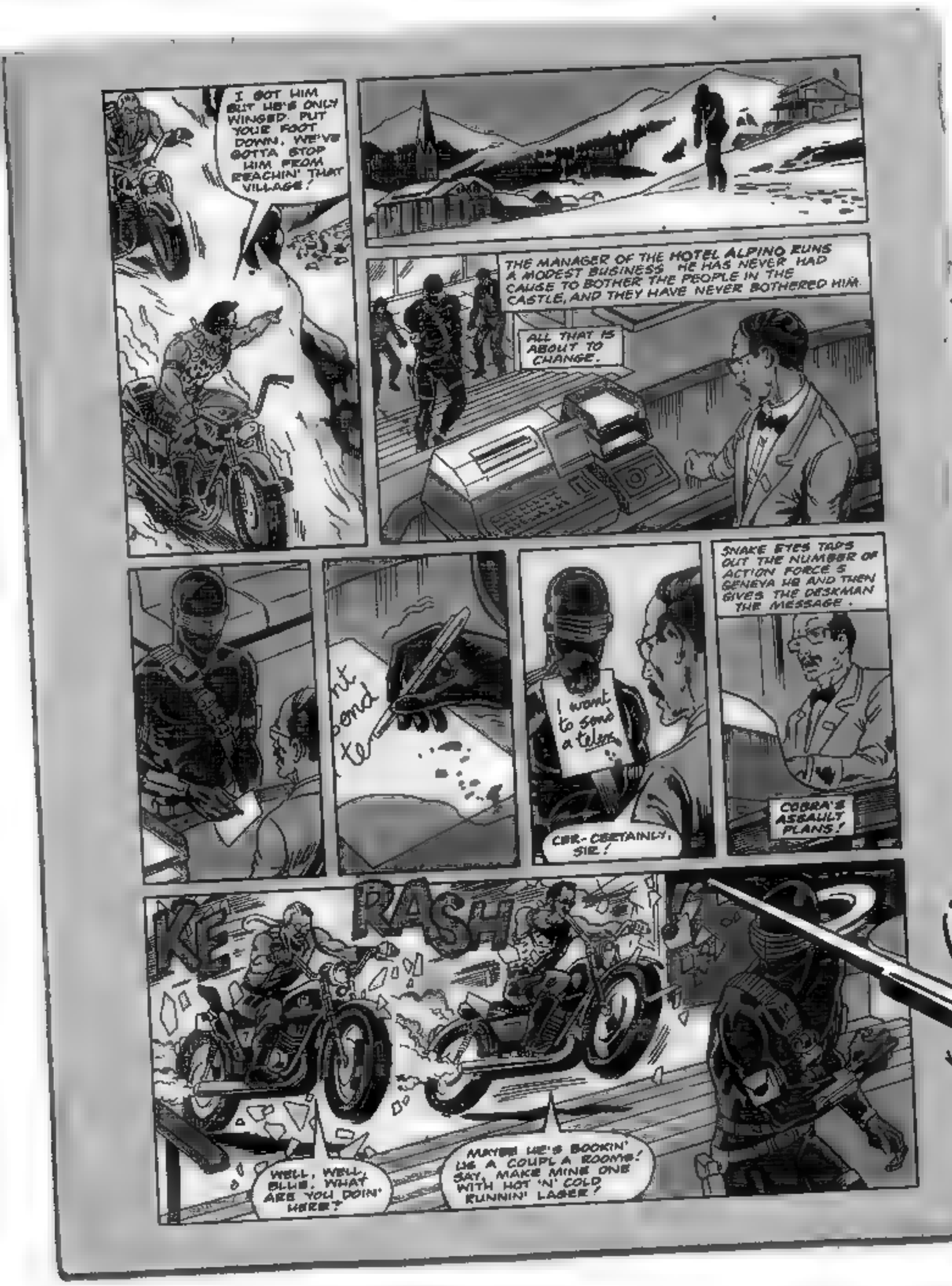
BATTLE
with STORM FORCE
26p
ACTION man
ACTION FORCE
STARTS TODAY!
THEY'RE LIKE DEVILS THEY DON'T KNOW FEAR!
GOOD. MY SHADOWS SOON WE'LL BE READY TO SHOW OUR WORK TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD

based comics. "We were given a large amount (sometimes too much!) of background info about characters such as *Ring Raiders*, *Action Force*, *MASK* and *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* from the toy companies. This was all very useful and helped the stories hugely. The main problem was that the stories usually had to be 'vetted' by the toy manufacturer which sometimes resulted in changes having to be made. I had to stick closely to what the toy company wanted and there was little room to try anything new or exciting. But despite this they were great fun to write.. usually!"

A banner on the front cover of the 6 October 1984 edition declared that it was a 'Big News Issue!' From the following week the comic would, a little like *Whizzer and Chips*, be two comics in one - *Battle* and the *Action Force* pullout section. With its own cover, letters page and features in addition to the stories, *Action Force* was now effectively a comic in its own right. Not only that, but the first new look issue came with a free Baron Ironblood mask as well!

In January 1985, a new story, 'World Enemy No.1', brought big changes to the world of *Action Force*. In real life, Palitoy ceased producing toys at their factory in Leicester and Hasbro became responsible for the *Action Force* range. *Action Force* therefore became a repackaged version of G.I. Joe, with AF itself united into one single team and Baron Ironblood and the Red Shadows replaced by a new foe–Cobra. In the story it was explained that Ironblood had changed his identity to become Cobra Commander, ditched the Red Shadows and recruited new troops. Hence the toys in the shops and the characters on the page continued to correspond. It was a masterful piece of marketing and made for a fine story in the process. Interestingly, the Red Shadows would return under the leadership of Ironblood's former deputy, the Black Major, and the four original AF units which were, we were told, continuing to operate, would also make reappearances. It was a nice bit of continuity which rewarded long-time readers and made for some exciting story possibilities - the Black Major was somewhat miffed by Ironblood's betrayal, to say the least!

In May and June 1985, there was an exciting run of free gifts in *Battle Action Force* including posters, stickers–and 3D glasses! Selected


I GOT HIM BUT HE'S ONLY WINGED. PUT YOUR FOOT DOWN. WE'VE GOTTA STOP HIM FROM REACHIN' THAT VILLAGE!
THE MANAGER OF THE HOTEL ALPINO RUNS A MODEST BUSINESS. HE HAS NEVER HAD CAUSE TO BOTHER THE PEOPLE IN THE CASTLE, AND THEY HAVE NEVER BOTHERED HIM.
ALL THAT IS ABOUT TO CHANGE.
I want to send a telex
I want to send a telex
CER- CEETAINLY, SIR!
SNAKE EYES TAPS OUT THE NUMBER OF ACTION FORCE'S GENEVA HQ AND THEN GIVES THE DESKMAN THE MESSAGE.
COBRA'S ASSAULT PLANS!
KE- RASH
WELL, WELL, BLUE. WHAT ARE YOU DOIN' HERE?
MAYBE HE'S BOOKIN' US A COUPL A ROOMS! SAY, MAKE MINE ONE WITH HOT 'N' COLD RUNNIN' LAGER!

panels from the *Action Force* stories were shown in 3D, an experiment which had earlier been tried with the 1980s Eagle.

The 24 May 1986 issue of *Battle Action Force* featured an interesting twist of events. Cobra was said to have taken over the comic and the words 'Action Force' were ruthlessly crossed out on the front cover. Cobra Commander oversaw the letters page, a position normally occupied by Action Force Sergeant Duke, and stories in the comic were told from Cobra's point of view. Action Force was soon back in charge, however, and the stores were retold the following week from Action Force's point of view!

June 1986 saw the beginning of a huge Action Force story, 'Operation Deep Cover', which it was promised would 'show every aspect of the AF operation–on land, sea and in the air.' Readers were asked to vote on who they wanted to win the final battle between the two old foes–Action Force or Cobra. The results of the ballot remain unknown. Either way, the Action Force stories ended in the 29 November 1986 issue with Cobra down but not necessarily out and Cobra Commander apparently insane.

Battle Action Force became *Battle* once more, the rights to Action Force passing to Marvel UK. Their *Action Force* comic started in March 1987, combining reprints of American G.I. Joe strips with new stories from British creators. That, however, is another story...

There were still good times for *Battle* ahead. The comic changed to higher quality paper and a replacement for *Action Force* was dreamed up in the form of a new fighting team–*Storm Force*. Battle Group Editor Barrie Tomlinson remembers this time: "When we lost *Action Force* I had either to find a replacement or just carry on with the rest of *Battle*. We dreamed up *Storm Force* and spent a lot of time on creating characters and situations. I think we did so well that *Storm Force* would have made a great toy product. Richard Burton worked with me on creating *Storm Force* and the story proved to be a hit with the readers. Artwork by the Vanyo brothers was a big plus for the story. The other day I came across some of my original notes about *Storm Force* and found the documents to be fascinating. If only I could remember where I have put them..."

In early 1988, *Battle* merged with *Eagle* and some of the *Battle* stories continued to be reprinted for many years.

The Action Force toys and comic strips continue to have a huge fan following today, as evidenced by the extremely successful fan website, *bloodforthebaron.com*.

This continued interest pleases Barrie Tomlinson: "It's a great compliment to all the writers, artists and editorial staff who worked on the title." The *Action Force* characters are so popular, in fact, that an adapted version of the Red Shadows has appeared in the American GI Joe comics! Recently, there has of course been a GI Joe film allowing fans to see characters such as Cobra Commander and Destro on the big screen.

The *Action Force* legacy lives on. ●

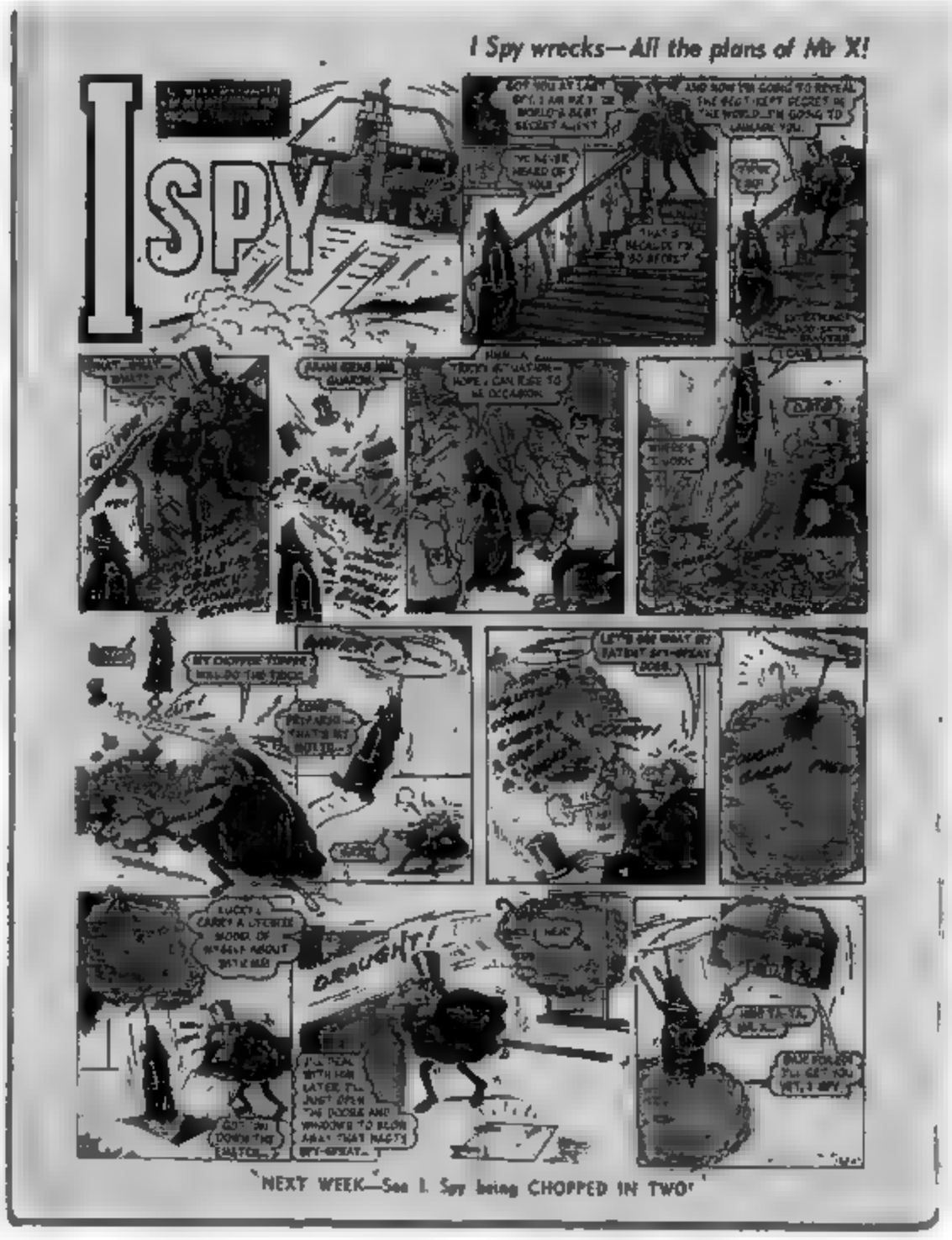
HMM.
YES SIR WE HAVE ALREADY STARTED PLANNING A RECONQUEST O FORCE IS NOW IN THE AREA AND MAKING THE FIRST MOVES!
SO IT'S ALL UP TO ACTION FORCE OTHERWISE WE BOW TO THIS BARON'S DEMANDS
AT THE MOMENT IN THE SEA OFF EAST PINAMOY ISLAND AT A SPEED IN THE OPERATIONAL CRAFT OF O FORCE
SHORE'S CRAWLING WITH THOSE RED BLOODIES BUT SOME OF THEM ARE IN FOR A SURPRISE
FROM THE SHADOWS AND OTHER O FORCE MEN LANDED
IN S PAIR OF SENTRIES WE WANT JUST ONE SEAN PAUL
OUI ALL READY
GOT YE LADDIE WE'LL TAKE HIM TO THE STINGRAY AN TAKE HIM BACK TO THE SHIP FOR INTERROGATION
UGH
THE STINGRAY WAS AN AQUATROOP CRAFT
CUTTING IT FINE YE WERE!
JUST LEND A HAND LIAM HE'S COMING ROUND
UHHHHH.
TALK FAST YOU'RE A PRISONER WHERE IS THE JUNGLE ROAD DEVICE ON THE ISLAND? WHO IS THE BARON?
THE BARON... YES
THE SOLDIER SNARLED HIS TEETH
FOR BARON AMEE BLOOD-AAGH!
AND.
CIRCLE THE ISLAND ON BEACH RECONNA SCARCE SUPPORT IS ON THE WAY
BUT WITH HIS BOMB AND SUIC DE TROOPS THIS IRONBLOOD SEEMS TO HAVE THE DOPE ON HIS SIDE
MEANWHILE
ONE SENTRY MISSING BARON BUT HE WON'T TALK KNEW O FORCE WOULD SOON BE HERE
HE'S KILLED NUMBERS OF HIS INFECTED PERSON AND HIS BLOOD CURDLE THIS BARON'S FOLLOWERS ARE ALL FANATICS
WE + SIGNAL FOR FURTHER ORDERS

We've all heard of Bond, UNCLE and The Avengers, all enduring films and TV shows from the magical 60s. As if those thrills and spills were not enough, Crikey! *invites you on another clandestine operation as* **Rab Smith** *takes us on a journey into the comic underworld where he exposes ...*

THE LEGEND OF I SPY

The 1960s witnessed a flourish of spymania in much of the entertainment world: the spy-high profile kicking off in 1962 with the first Bond flick, *Dr No*, and mutating into the surreal antics of the televised *The Avengers*, *The Prisoner*, and *The Man from UNCLE* later on in the decade to great commercial success.

The world of UK Comics was not backwards in capitalizing upon the trend, with IPC'S *James Pond* (*Buster*) Odham's decidedly oddball *Cloak* from Mike Higgs (*POW!*) and *The Man from BUNGLE* (also from Odhams) all contributing much cloak-and-dagger mirth for 60s kid's amusement. Perhaps the most impressive secret-agent entry in the 'funnies' comic field, however, came courtesy of the traditionalist DC Thomson, with their late entry Mahairee read: 1969 Mahairee *I SPY*, which debuted in *Sparky* comic in February of that year.



(ABOVE): TOP-HATTED TOP VILLAIN MR X'S FIRST APPEARANCE (SPARKY 217, MARCH 15, 1969)

I SPY was part of the title's legendary 'revamp' of this period, (the comic's first four years of existence had seen worthy strips like the evergreen *Moonsters* and the Alice in Wonderland-like *Dreamy Dave and Dozy Dora*), however a certain staidness had been creeping into much of the papers' output, and the overall tone of *Sparky* from this point on took on a welcome zanier, and sometimes anarchic outlook more in tune with the openness of the very late 60s.

I SPY was quite unlike any other DC Thomson–or indeed any publishers comic creation: almost abstract in design in the early incarnation of an all-black solid mass, representing his oversized trenchcoat and hat, which totally obscured hi never-seen face, he appears to be human (he has visible hands-at times–and his naked legs are occasionally glimpsed) he is nevertheless a perplexing impossibility, as a vast array of telescopic/retractable secret devices and weaponry are unleashed to endless effect from beneath his clothing.

The sheer inventiveness of this idea presented limitless opportunity for comic potential, augmented by the zestful inking of original artist Les Barton (1922-2008) and also the top-notch scriptwriting of Peter Clark. Together, these comic visionaries freshly minted a bona-fide comics legend.

I SPY SPEEDING TOWARDS THE ACTION, AS EVER·
(ARTWORK BY BRIAN WALKER : 'I SPY AND THE MASTER PHONEY!')

The strip debuted on 1 February, 1969, (issue 211), the same number that seen *Barney Bulldog* scoop front-cover status. For the first few weeks of the strip's existence, the absurdist spy-exploits somewhat reflected *Mad Magazines*' *SPY vs SPY* (another early 60s espionage success) with much manic gags of a decidedly slapstick nature: the very first outing is a modest, unassuming affair–with no real gadgetry to speak of–however, there is much surrealist invention even this early in the game, for it is established that *I SPY* has the ability to abandon his still-standing suit: a visual gag that enjoyed endless mileage. The following week saw the introduction of the first-ever *I SPY* villain: the never-seen-again *Hoots McBagpipes*, whose dastardly ambitions are confined to logging an uncooked haggis at our hero! Gradually, however, more ambitious plotlines were granted free rein, and a plethora of diabolical counter-spies were duly introduced to provide effective foils (who were themselves systematically foiled) by the altogether decent good egg: the mysterious *I SPY*. Centre of operations Spy HQ was established from the outset: this was an ever-shifting, never properly defined headquarters, forever under siege from demented desperadoes of a usually-exotic nature.

Boss Spy was in attendance from frame one of the very first instalment, although his very early appearances were limited to his issuing out orders Mahairee initially with an authoritarian air–from behind his desk. Boss looked like he was in his mid-50s, yet he sported coolly sinister back shades.

Colourful foes to emerge in the early mini-adventures (they were really slapstick excursions with excellent visual flair) included Soviet bad-'un Slinky Snitchovitch (from behind the putty curtain!) and oriental martial arts expert Karate Chip: in the main, these early opponents seemed quite content to thwart *I SPY* with fairly modest means: i.e. the lobbing of round black anarchist bombs, usually framed in a very silly storyline. Our hero always retaliated with his 'shell-sender-backer', for example, however by the strips' sixth outing, the very first 'continued-next-week' story emerged, which introduced the series' most memorable and enduring villain: the incomparable, Incredible Mr X. An especially tenacious deviant bedecked in vintage Victorian-era chic (shiny top-hat, flowing cape and ever-present cigar holder), Mr X unleashes ever-increasing war against society, in his untiring >

NO TIME TO WASTE. HE HAS LEFT EVILONIAN NUMBER. I GO SELL DOCUMENTS!
PLEASANT DREAMS
PFFFT!
WHEN WONG NUMBA ARRIVED HOME
TING-A-LING! TING-A-LING? WHERE THAT OLD TEA-DRINKER AT, I ASK MYSELF?
www.crikeyuk.co.uk
Crikey!

quest to dominate the world. The fact he has no visible means of support is immaterial to him: his sheer shameless ambition and ability to strike against Spy HQ by his wits alone is enough to mark him out as the series' equivalent of the Joker out of Batman.

Mr X's earlier appearances were consistent with the playful silliness of the early single-pagers, which gave way to extended 3-part stories, *The Squadron of Super-Irons*, (issues 219-221) and the final one-pager serial: *The Extra-Sticky Toffee Mystery* (issues 222-224). Increased complexity was beginning to infuse the still-very-silly storylines, as writer Clark and artist Barton threw themselves into their respective roles with great gusto. However, as the strip attained great reader popularity right from the outset, there is no denying that the series really caugh fire with the launch of the first two-page serial: *I SPY* versus the Incredible Mr X, the ambitious eight-parter which commenced with issue 225 (28 June, 1969).

Further refinements within the *I SPY* format included permanent 'tune in next week' cliffhangers, more expressive art layouts due to the new increased space, and more involved storytelling, all of which was liberally sprinkled with much danger and melodrama: the sum total of which was injected with a great sense of lunatic comedy.

In the debut serial-'proper', Mr X constructs a robotic *I SPY* double, who robs banks and sees our hero framed for crimes he did not commit. The escalating events see *I SPY* tracking down his demonic mirror-image and destroy it, only to be confronted with the Victorian Vagabond responding with no less than twelve fully-functioning *I SPY* doppelgangers. The tale's highlight is undoubtedly episode 5, which sees a highly-charged showdown with our secret agent hero very bravely taking on the might of his 12-fold threat, who apparently obliterate *I SPY* with vastly superior firepower.

The touching conclusion to this instalment is remedied by the following week's revelation that our 'Shhh! Guy' had escaped his near-doom by the oft-used 'dive-under-a convenient-manhole-cover-routine' and *I SPY* ventures on to vanquish his dozen robotic opponents, only to witness the might of Mr X's trump card: the Mega-Kong scaled Superspy: essentially a world-threatening stainless-steel versio of the story's hero, with grand-scale devices to boot! This very entertaining, highly inventive extravaganza ends with *I SPY* comedically gumming up Superspy's works using jokeshop sneezing-powder and hiccup-pills: Mr X is abandoned at the story's end, amidst the twisted wreckage of his scuppered colossus, as *I SPY* bounces off manically into the sunset, a victim of his own 'hiccuping pills'. *I SPY* versus the Incredible Mr X is arguably the series' highpoint, with it's remarkable blend of slapstick surrealism complimented with the endless invention of the no-holds-barred storyline, which quite literally bristles with tireless invention.

Sparky issue 233 (5 July 1969) saw *I SPY* and Boss track down the Ali Baba-like Mahairee Yogi, who possessed mystical powers (including a highly-original ten-foot animated beard!) in the quest of *I SPY* and the Fantasmajor Diamond Hunt, which unleashed the terrors of man-eating plants and the Abominable Snowmen–amongst other pressing engagements–within an ever-changing global backdrop over it's it eight weekly instalments. The series changed direction once again with the highly comic *I SPY* versus *Aye McSpy the Tartan Terror*; this was a more scaled-

back six-parter (debuting on 30 Aug) laced with the most deliberately manic tale of the entire spy–saga: the Popeye-like McSpy's aggressive Caledonian demeanour belies his natural cunning, with which he has concocted a patent 'paralyzing porridge' which has seen him assemble a deep-frozen collection of the planet's more dangerous spies, including Mr X and Mahairee (*I SPY* and Boss are pencilled in for inclusion next!)

The sheer escalating absurdity of this very amusing and impressive story makes it another essential reading chapter within the saga.

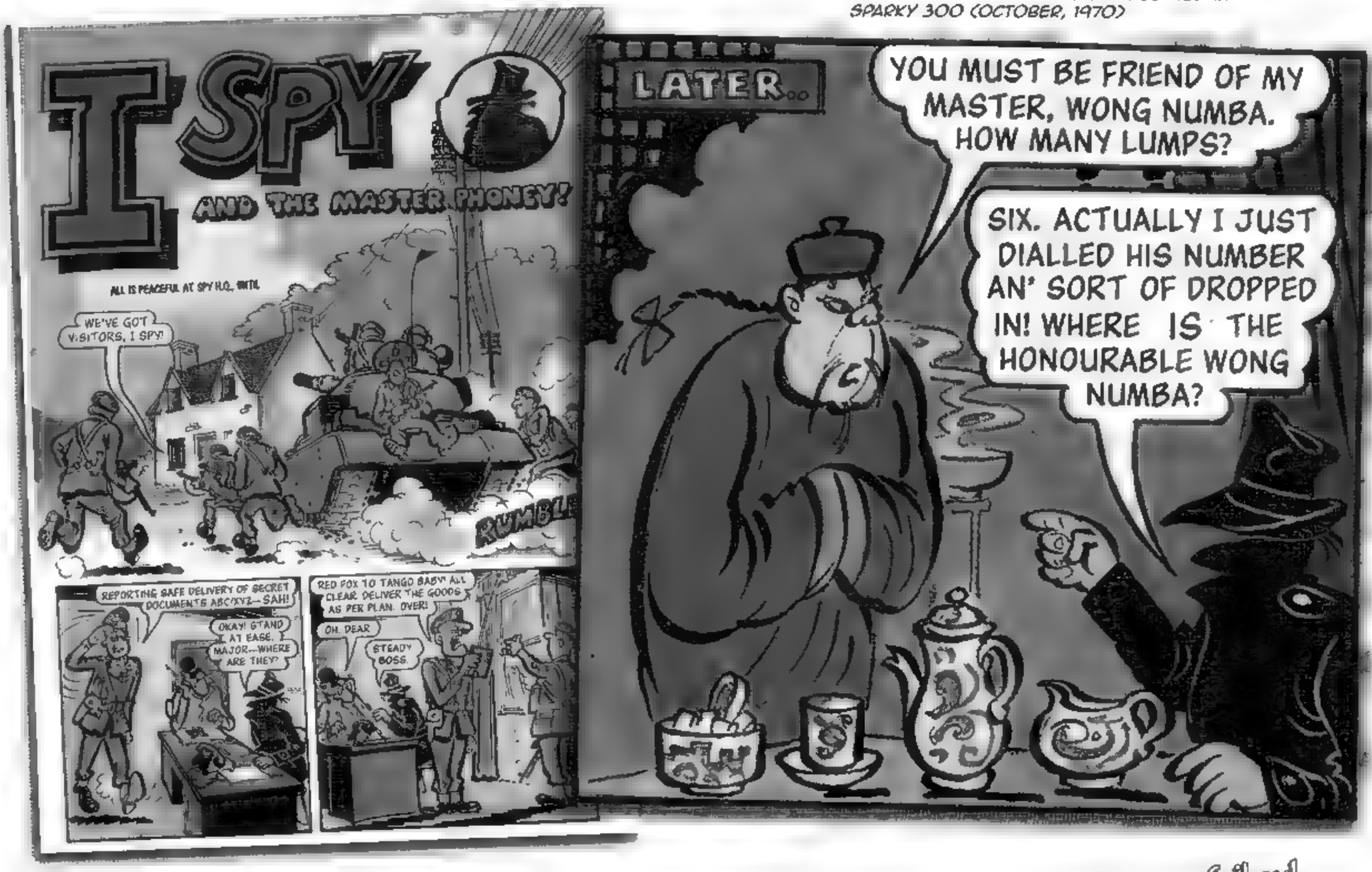
Further diversity from the *I SPY* files emerged in *I SPY* and his T-T-Terrible Granny (a bold five-parter debuting on 11 Oct '69, over five instalments): here we are introduced to the early period's admittedly most non-descript villain, the chameleon-like Cammy Flage, a (surprise!) disguise expert who harbours delusions of taking on the world. This untypically low-par tale also features the too-obviously-included-for comic-relief Granny Spy , and although the artwork in this story is as vital and full of energy as was customary, the story drags a bit early on, but is redeemed with a suitably manic and action-packed finale. The series enjoyed a welcome return to form with the excellent 5-parter *I SPY* versus Mister Tempest, a gloriously epic tale of devastation and destruction, courtesy of Tempest's portable weather-machine, which wreaks unending turmoil from the forces of nature. MR Tempest actually pulls off the not unimpressive coup of blotting out the sun at the story's climax: albeit temporarily. One of the most consistently energetic stories of the saga, this one ran from issue 252, (15 Nov 1969.)

Mr X returned in a fine four-episode mini-epic : *I SPY* and the Fantasmagorian, once again, the top-hatted desperado of Victorianna finery inflicts lethal war-machinery on mankind, after constructing a 100-foot high invincible mobile weapon from the depths of his secret underground factory. In some respects this is a re-run of the previous Cammy Flage misfire, (complete with Granny) but with superior pacing sharper plotting and more satisfying storytelling at the helm. This relatively modest tale (which bridged the 60s/70s decades, starting in issue 257–20 DEC, 1969) marked the final 2-page instalmens, as the undisputed popularity of *I SPY* from this point onwards seen the final transformation of the Barton era, in which the saga upped the stakes with even more dynamic storytelling than before, with the added bonus of further experimentation available through the increased space , which introduced more 'epic' titling and spacial 'splash'-like panels.

Three final stories from the first *I SPY* 'age' emerged: the first 3-page excursion came under the heading *I SPY* and the Amazing Master Mind Machines: a sumptuous six-parter beginning on 17 Jan 1970 (issue 261). Here we are priveliged to witnes the introduction of the suave-but-sinister Mr Mastermind, whom, though featuring in two serials only, would nevertheless leave an indelible stamp upon the saga.

Mastermind's contribution to the series was his sheer uniqueness: basically an ultra-clever Howard Hughes-like inventor, he has amassed a true fortune, which has enabled him to indulge his long-held deviant fantasy of ruling the world. This he hopes to pull off by the control of innocent-looking coffee-dispensers and suchlik he has sold worldwide through his business cartels. Unknown by everyone else ' til too late, Mastermind's machines are >

BRIAN WALKER'S LOOSER I SPY ARTWORK DEBUTED IN SPARKY 300 (OCTOBER, 1970)


I SPY
AND THE MASTER PHONEY!
ALL IS PEACEFUL AT SPY H.Q. UNTIL
WE'VE GOT VISITORS, I SPY!
RUMBLE
REPORTING SAFE DELIVERY OF SECRET DOCUMENTS ABCXYZ—SAH!
OKAY! STAND AT EASE, MAJOR—WHERE ARE THEY?
RED FOX TO TANGO BABY! ALL CLEAR. DELIVER THE GOODS AS PER PLAN. OVER!
OH, DEAR
STEADY BOSS.
LATER...
YOU MUST BE FRIEND OF MY MASTER, WONG NUMBA. HOW MANY LUMPS?
SIX. ACTUALLY I JUST DIALLED HIS NUMBER AN' SORT OF DROPPED IN! WHERE IS THE HONOURABLE WONG NUMBA?

equipped with secret robotic devices, which transform them into all-out combat war robots, and their creator actually succeeds in dominating every nation on Earth, ruling the entire planet! During Mastermind's 'official' King of the World crowning ceremony, he is quite literally 'crowned' by *I SPY*, but not exactly in the way he had so pompously intended(!). This entry is yet another admirable contender unlike all that has gone before (in *I SPY* and indeed elsewhere) showcasing the increased maturity of the scriptwriting, with a top-notch new villain who gave even Mr X a run for his money ... fantastic stuff!

The penultimate Clark/Barton collaboration arrived courtesy of issue 267 (28 FEB 1970): untitled in the original *Sparky* comics, but listed in some sources as *I SPY* and the Baffling Mr X Mystery, this story spanned over seven episodes, and if the script is somewhat disjointed by *I SPY* standards, it is nevertheless admirable in it's refusal to reheat formulae and to strike out in it's own unique tangent. The eccentric plotting in this one sees MR X escape jail utilizing 'magic powers' he has acquired: seemingly invincible through 'invisible' forces he has mastered (he can control tanks which were meant to control him!) he usurps the hot-seat of political power, making the Houses of Parliament his new abode, and instructs his newly-founded Terror Army to obliterate SPY HQ. *I SPY* survives through his ingenious devices, eventually cracking the mystery of Mr X'S powers: he is electronically controlling an almost-invisible army of supercharged fleas, who can control events from a distance. Standard fly-spray (or should that be SPY-Spray!) saves the day, and Mr X is last seen perilously plunging into the freezing Thames, having burst clean through the mighty clockface of Big Ben, in his attempt to shake off the pursuing *I SPY*. Although this offering lacks a truly consistent, satisfying storyline, the artwork of MR X in particular is second-to-none, and the individual instalments are enhanced greatly from an ingenious (and very accomplished) 'newspaper' motif which frames every episode of this inclusion. An excellent example of how the strip constantly threw up surprises, continually delving into uncharted territory.

Peter Clark and Les Barton last contributed to the regular *Sparky I SPY* serials in a six-part melodrama: the dour, dark and dank Operation *I SPY*, a truly sober and sombre tragi-epic, which upped the film-noir ambience to the point where the stor abandoned almost all traces of humour, which had so characterized the earlier chapters. Sold almost as a straight mystery, the nightmarish, forboding tone tha entombs this fable makes for intruiging reading, and qualifies this story as another genuine high-point, which had seen the ever-evolving *I SPY* format leap

(LEFT): ECONOMY OF STYLE COURTESY OF BRIAN WALKER (RIGHT). AN ESPECIALLY AMBITIOUS PAGE LAYOUT FROM ORIGINAL ARTIST LES BARTON

IN NEARBY GUNPOWDER LANE
ROUND THE CORNER DUH!?!
GOT YOUR GUM DROPS, BOSS. ANYTHING HAPPENIN'?
THE USUAL...COUPLE OF BANK RAIDS...
OH, AND SOME IDIOT'S PINCHED A PHONE BOX! THE THINGS PEOPLE DO!
TH' ONE IN GUN-POWDER LANE?
YES, BUT LOOK HERE, HOW DO YOU KNOW? IT'S JUST COME OVER THE WIRE...
HEY! COME BACK! WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
WON'T BE A TICK. WATCH THE SECRET DOCUMENTS!
WHOOOSSH!

Daily Spy
SPECIAL EDITION
ZERO HOUR FOR MR X?
THE CLUE THAT COULD SMASH HIS EVIL PLANS
WILL THE PROFESSOR CRACK THE SECRET OF MR X'S "MAGIC POWER?"
A DAILY SPY EXCLUSIVE
I MUST STOP THE OLD FOOL FROM EXAMINING THAT CLUE...
AHA SO THAT'S WHAT IT IS
MUST CALL SPY AND LET HIM KNOW I'VE FOUND OUT WHAT IT
AH! THAT'LL BE THE PROF.
RING
AH, ARRIVED NOT A SECOND TOO SOON!
SPY! THE CLUE—YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHAT IT IS...
WHAT IS IT?
HE... HA-HA-HA-HA-RA-RA-GLEE!

further still into almost 'psychological' territory. Running from issues 274-279 (18 April-23 May, 1970), the sinister tone is set by a sinister plot hatched by some of *I SPY*'S more formidable ex-opponents–led by Mastermind–which sees SPY HQ under siege (yet again) from a sinister and robotic Matic-Man, which proves too powerful for even *I SPY* to disable. The mighty 'droid decimates HQ and escapes with Boss, travelling miles to hurtle him clean off a clifftop. A devastated and dejected *I SPY* vows to bring to justice whoever instigated this, but on return to base is alarmed (as were many *Sparky* readers, including me!) to be greeted by an unaffected Boss, who questions why *I SPY* is acting strangely, ranting on about robots and abductions! To cut a long story short, our hero has been duped using an elaborate plot involving hypnosis, deception and other ploys, and is unjustly framed for crimes committed by Mastermind and others, which has resulted in our Shhh! Guy being stripped of all (well, nearly all!) his secret devices and sentenced to ten years in the slammer. In the outside world, Mastermind's Matic-Men are wiping out the armed forces as their inventor prepares to loot Britain of all assets. *I SPY* escapes jail, tracking down Mastermind to his castle lair: a last-hour plan of desperation is launched, as *I SPY* tricks Mastermind (who *I SPY* never actually sees throughout the proceedings) into switching off the Matic-Men so he can booby-trap the 'droids with explosive charges.

Mastermind throws the master-switch too early, however, and the entire crumbling lair–including all baddies as well as our hero–is blown into Kingdom come, leaving a distraught Boss to depart the doom-laden scenario, lamenting the destruction of his brave secret agent.

A vitally impressive, almost flawless allegory that encapsulates all that can be accomplished within effective scripting and artwork within the comics medium, this apocalyptic series of skulduggery and melodrama is more of an event rather than a standard comic story, and although the climax was not exactly good news for *I SPY* fans, the overall achievement ranks as possibly the highest watermark of the entire saga, at least in terms of scripting maturity.

I SPY would return later in 1970, under the new pensmanship of Brian Walker, who stamped his own unique brand of cartoonery onto the project. Further impressive work would follow from the series' later incarnations, however, for many early fans, the energy and spirit of the Clark-Barton axis represented the highest quality o the unfairly uncelebrated spy-saga, which remains unforgettable to many comics aficionados who appreciated the scope and relentless drive of this superior and generally undervalued comics hero, a true latter-day legend to it's more ardent fans.

Never beaten–never topped! ●

THE FINAL GREAT I SPY STORY OF THE SPARKY BOOKS. THIS EXAMPLE IS TAKEN FROM THE 1975 ANNUAL.

FORWARD! DOWN A BIT! STEADY... FIRE!
I SAY—LOOK HERE. DO SOMETHING, I SPY!
H'M'M'M'M...
SECRET DOCUMENTS ABC/XYZ SAFELY DELIVERED. SIGN FOR THEM, SAH!
VERY NEAT, MAJOR. VERY NEAT!
PLOP!
THIS ROOM HASN'T TO BE LEFT EMPTY FOR A MOMENT UNTIL TH' CONFERENCE IN THREE DAYS TIME. GRUMBLE!
I'D BETTER PHONE GRANNY SPY- TELL HER I WON'T BE HOME THIS WEEK...
...AN' STOCK UP WITH GUM DROPS T'KEEP BOSS HAPPY I'LL PHONE FROM TH' BOX
THE GUNPOWDER LANE NUMBER RANG—ONLY IT WAS NO LONGER IN GUNPOWDER LANE!
'ALLO PLEES? THAT YOU, MASTER?
NO—IT'S ME—AN' THIS BOX IS GETTIN' A BIT CROWDED!
LATER
YOU MUST BE FRIEND OF MY MASTER, WONG NUMBA. HOW MANY LUMPS?
SIX. ACTUALLY I JUST DIALLED HIS NUMBER AN' SORT OF DROPPED IN! WHERE IS THE HONOURABLE WONG NUMBA?
ALAS! WHERE INDEED? TIMBUCTOO? WIGAN? ANYWHERE THERE IS PHONE. SINCE HE INVENT LATEST TOY HE NEVER IN. ACTUALLY HE DOWN STREET HAVING PIGTAIL CURLED...
EXPECT HE HOME SOON. HIM HAVE APPOINTMENT EVILONIA EMBASSY THREE P.M. I HAVE LOOKED UP PHONE NUMBER— READY FOR HIM!
AN' HE'LL BE USIN' THIS PHONE TO DIAL HIMSELF THERE! H'M'M'M!
AN' THERE'S OUR DOCUMENTS ALL READY TO GO WITH HIM...
HOME SEC.

THE BOJEFFRIES SAGA

BY ANDREW EDWARDS

The Bojeffries Saga was a comic strip written by Alan Moore and drawn by Steve Parkhouse. It first appeared in *Warrior*, an anthology comic published by Dez Skinn's Quality comics imprint. It's something of a neglected classic. Other strips in Warrior would go on to wider acclaim, especially the Moore scripted Marvelman and V for Vendetta. Bojeffries, on the other hand, would be produced sporadically, appear in various publications, and finally disappear following a collected trade paperback printing by Tundra Press in 1991. It has been out of print ever since.

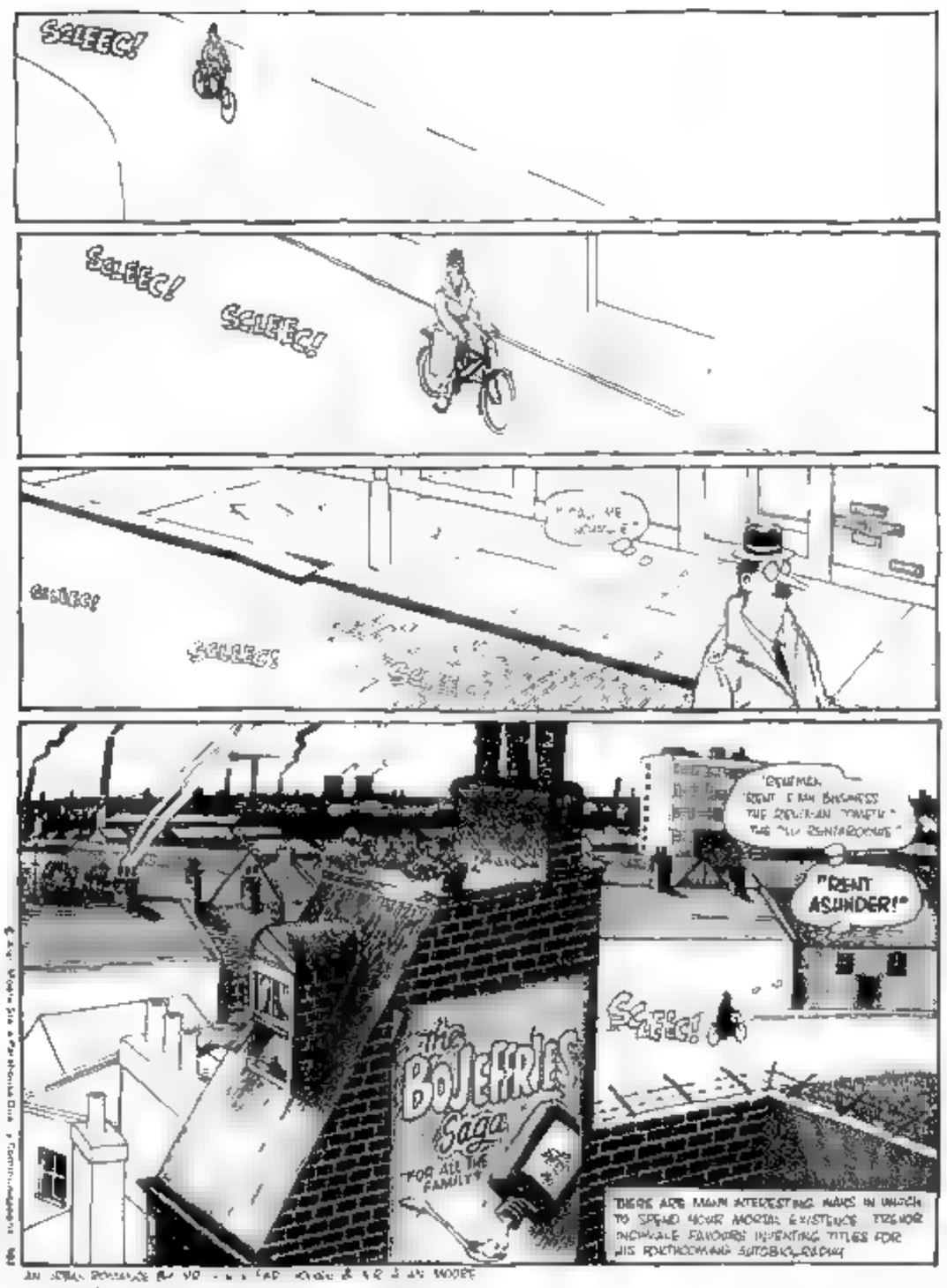
Readers were first introduced to the family in Warrior #12 (August 1983). Their images were spread across a cover page which proclaimed that they made "Monty Python look like a comedy", which was a meaningless description really, although it hinted at the absurd tone which would mark the strip out among the others in the comic. The cover also described the strip as 'a soap opera of the paranormal', which was a more accurate statement. Imagine Coronation Street mixed with the Munsters, spiced up with some HP sauce (HP Lovecraft, that is) and you may begin to see how weirdly surreal this strip was.

The opening episode was called 'The Rentman Cometh'. The rentman, Trevor Inchmale, rides his bicycle through Northampton (Moore's home town) collecting the rent and dreams about writing his autobiography. He has discovered a family, the Bojeffries, who have unpaid rent arrears which amount to £32,000. He becomes obsessed with this family and, after months of observation and research, manages to gain access to their house.

We meet the whole family as a result. Jobremus is the father and he appears to be relatively normal, despite numerous references to a broken 'curiosity damper'. This is where the weirdness starts. This damper has enabled the whole family to live undisturbed by society for over 90 years, and for good reason too. Ginda, Jobremus' daughter, is a voluminous, sex-obsessed, angry, omnipotent woman who is convinced that mankind is sexually intimidated by her. Uncle Raoul is a werewolf with an unhealthy appetite for poodles. Uncle Festus is incomprehensible and a vampire, but a vegetarian one. An unseen 'baby' exists in the cellar, while a son called Reth is perpetually dressed in a school uniform despite being many years into adulthood. Finally, Grandpa Podslap, a Lovecraftian god-monster with the power to manipulate atomic structure, lives in the greenhouse in the garden, which is only accessible via the attic in the house. After these introductions Inchmale invokes the wrath of Podslap and is transformed into a plant by the end of the second instalment in

#13. It's fair to say that space, time and logic work much differently in this universe.

We return to the family in Warrior #19 and #20 for another two-parter entitled 'Raoul's Night Out'. Raoul joins his workmates for a night out, mistakenly unaware that a full moon will appear that night, and force him to transform into his werewolf persona. He works in a factory and mangles his way through the English Language in the process, uttering bizarrely constructed sentences like "How are your legs getting over with the wife, old mates?" His work colleagues are almost as strange as the Bojeffries family. Mark of Zorro and his wife, Mrs Mark of Zorro (of course), are afflicted by lightning streak marks across their face, and it's as a result of this that they first met - at a skin specialist's office. Big Nigel is a minor character who appearance is quite literally cut short early in part one, when a hammocking pin comes loose and severs his finger. Little Nigel is a dwarf and an actor in 'blue' movies. Stanley is the foreman and head of the League of St Swithin, an inept racist group. George is black, and is offended by Stanley's leaflet, which contains racist propaganda.

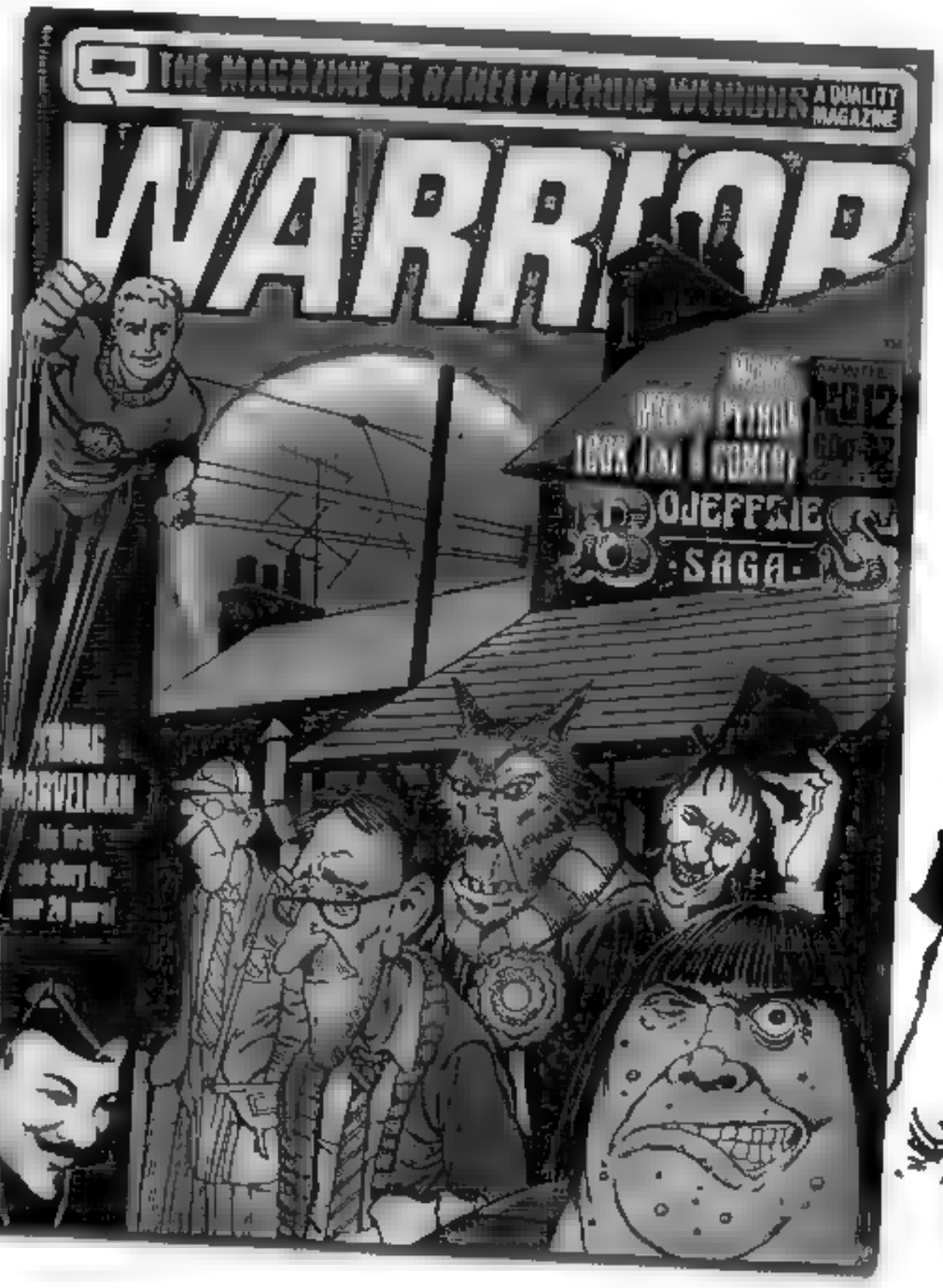


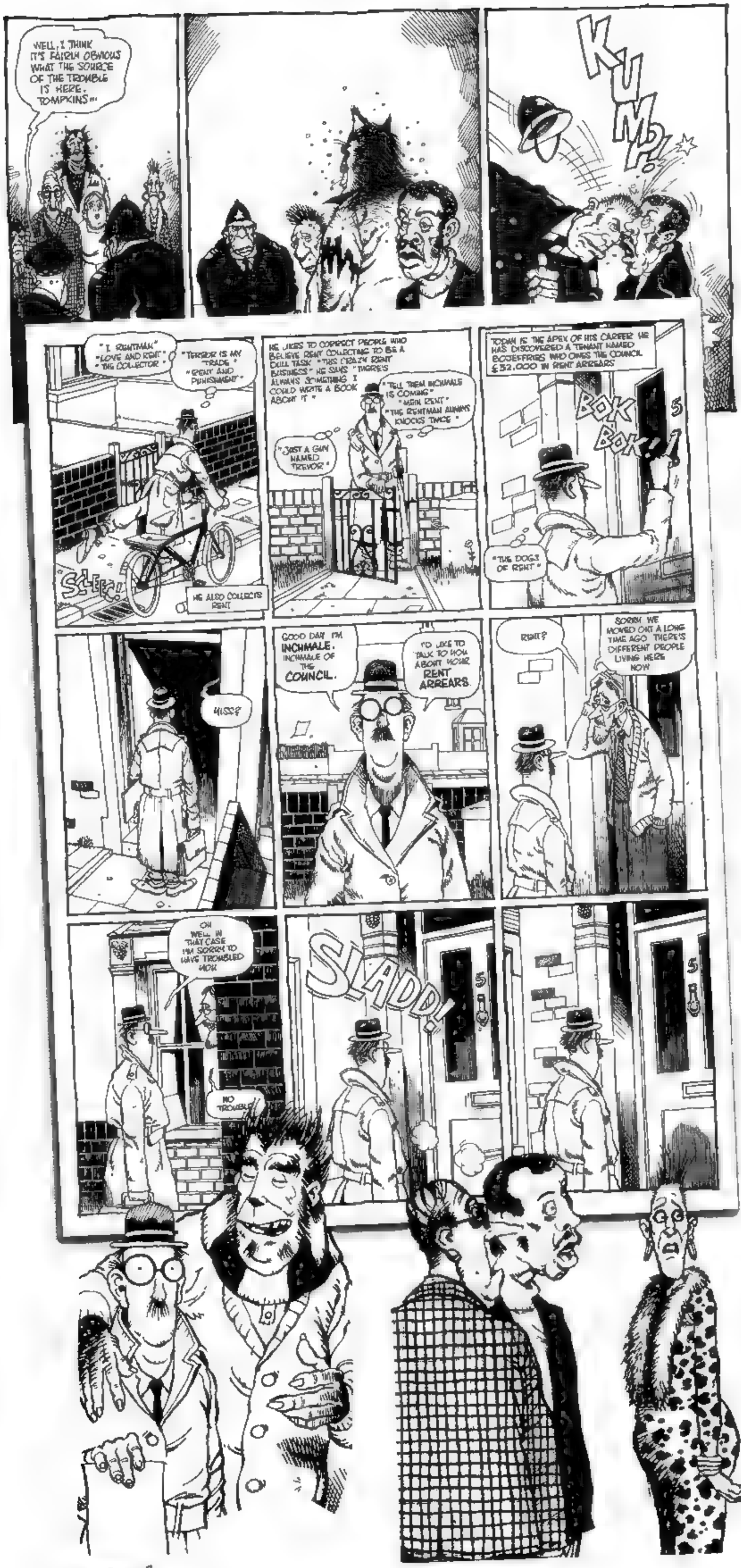
Raoul innocently passes on to him and havoc ensues. Finally, we have 'Colin Council Estate' and Sheena, two foul-mouthed punks who argue with and insult each other.

The night out itself is cut short when two policeman smash through the window of the restaurant and blame an innocent George for the disturbances. One copper deals with George by head -butting him and kneeing him in the groin. Racism and blind ignorance are the subject of parody throughout these two episodes, and Moore and Parkhouse show how pathetic such attitudes are by highlighting their absurdity through exaggeration.

This was the last time that Bojeffries would appear in Warrior. Despite attaining cult status the comic was cancelled with issue #26. Many cited pressure exerted by Marvel Comics USA over the use of the Marvelman name by Quality being a particular source of stress. The next Bojeffries story appeared in Dalgoda #8 (April 1986), published by Fantagraphics in the USA. It was called 'Batfishing in Suburbia'. Jobremus and Reth are fishing for Bats on the roof of their house. This involves using a drunken butterfly as bait, which they attached to a homemade rod. We are also reintroduced to Trevor Inchmale and learn that he lives with his overprotective mother. It was a prologue to the first published episode, and probably was to serve as an introductory piece to lay the way for a reprinting of the Warrior episodes in the USA, followed by a continuation of the series. This >

STEVE PARKHOUSE'S CARTOONY STYLE SUITED THE 'BOJEFFRIES' SAGA TO A 'T', CREATING STRANGE CHARACTERS FOR THE OFF-BEAT DRAMA...




WELL, I THINK IT'S FAIRLY OBVIOUS WHAT THE SOURCE OF THE TROUBLE IS HERE, TOMPKINS"
KUMP!
"I, RIGHTMAN" "LOVE AND RENT" "THE COLLECTOR"
"TERROR IS MY "TRADE" "GRIEF AND PUNISHMENT"
HE LIKES TO CORRECT PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE RENT COLLECTING TO BE A DULL TASK "THIS CRAZY RENT BUSINESS" HE SAYS "THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING I COULD WRITE A BOOK ABOUT IT"
"TELL THEM INCHMALE IS COMING" "MEIN RENT" "THE RIGHTMAN ALWAYS KNOCKS TWICE"
"JUST A GUN NAMED "TREVOR"
TODAY IS THE APEX OF HIS CAREER HE HAS DISCOVERED A TENANT NAMED BOJEFFRIES WHO OWES THE COUNCIL £32,000 IN RENT ARREARS
BOK BOK!
"THE DOGS OF RENT"
S-t-e-e-l
HE ALSO COLLECTS RENT
HISSS?
GOOD DAY I'M INCHMALE. INCHMALE OF THE COUNCIL.
I'D LIKE TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT YOUR RENT ARREARS
RIGHT?
SORRY WE MOVED OUT A LONG TIME AGO THERE'S DIFFERENT PEOPLE LIVING HERE NOW
OH WELL IN THAT CASE I'M SORRY TO HAVE TROUBLED YOU
NO TROUBLE
SLADD!
5
5

didn't happen though, as Dalgoda ended with this issue. Following a US reprint of the Warrior stories in Flesh and Bones #1-4 (coloured and reformatted for that market by Upshot Graphics), we next see the Bojeffries family in the pages of A1, a six part anthology comic published in the UK by Atomeka Press in 1989.

In A1 #1 Moore and Parkhouse gave readers 'Festus: Dawn of the Dead'. Uncle Festus is that one of that rare breed - a vegetarian vampire. In this story we see him try to make his way to and from a local shop before sunrise. He is keen to buy soy blood (very good for vegetarian black puddings, says the shopkeeper). He is disintegrated by the sun, burned by the X from a hot cross bun, staked through the heart by a garden post and tormented by copies of the unfortunately names Sun and Mirror newspapers (not favourites of vampires, obviously). He eventually makes it back to his coffin.

A1 #2 saw the publication of 'Sex, with Ginda Bojeffries'. The story begins with Ginda calling at the house of a complete stranger, a female who she punches, tars and feathers. She does this in order to create an uglier 'companion' to make herself look like a more attractive prospect for a date. When this plan fails she drags a poor man home and makes him watch an agricultural training film of a slaughterhouse thinking it is a blue movie. Ginda then attempts safe sex, which for her means being in a completely different room to her bewildered partner, who manages to escape the house.

'A Quiet Christmas with the Family' appeared in A1 #3. This odd tale features the whole family in a festive mood. Festus vomits upon hearing Christmas carols, and the singers beat him up in the doorway. The foot of an unfeasibly large tree dominates the living room. Presents are given: Reth's Airfix model of the Atlantic Ocean floods the house, Ginda snacks on a Faberge egg, and Grandpa Podslap is unhappy with his token. A bemused Santa also loses a reindeer due to Raoul's near-insatiable appetite.

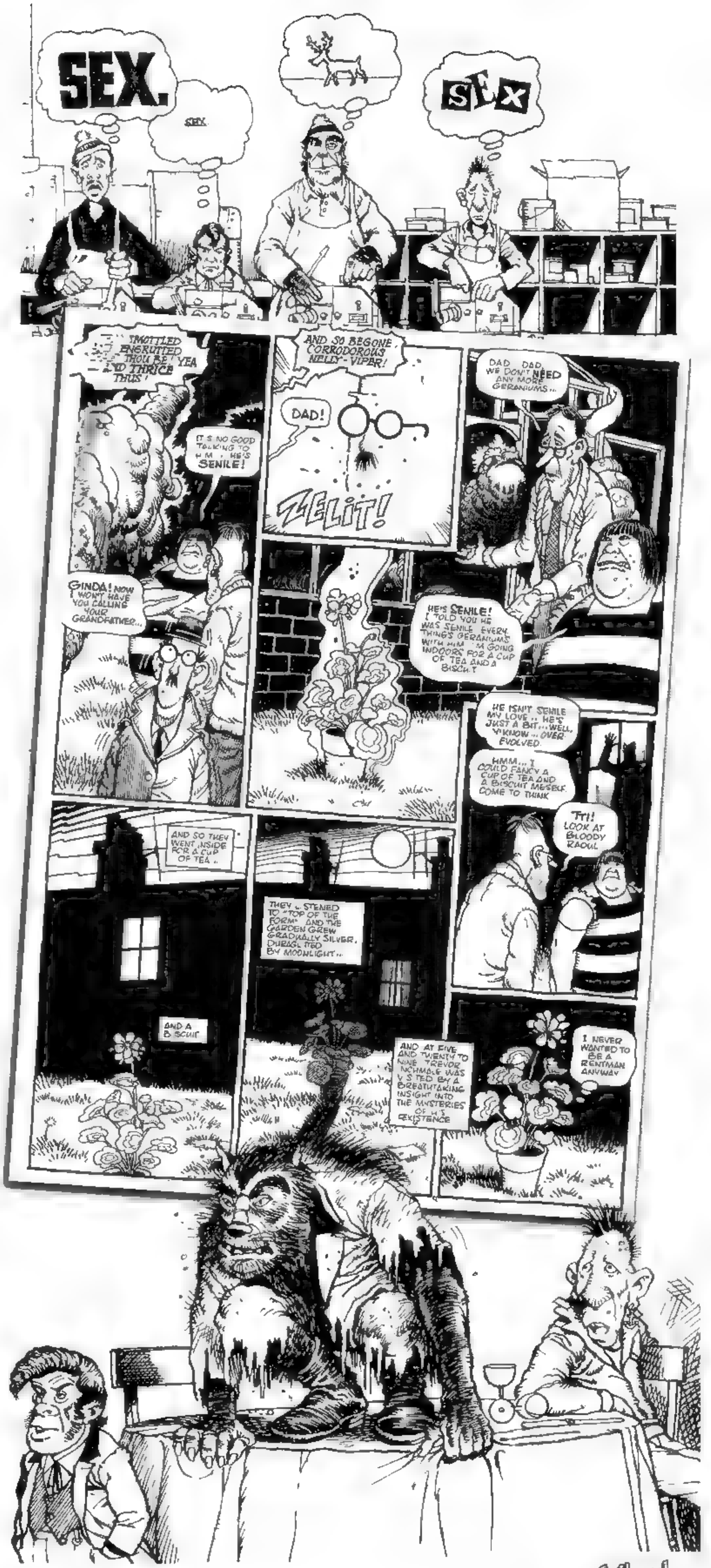
A1 #4 contained 'Song of the Terraces'. This story is one of Moore's earliest experiments with rhyme, poetry and music in comics. It's styled as an operatic libretto, with the

'orchestration' being created through the medium of Parkhouse's comic art, at least according to the credits. It's an oddly enjoyable exercise. Set in the early morning we see the newspaper boys making their deliveries, Raoul and his workmates making their way to the factory, and woman discussing their domestic affairs. The tone is darkly comic, and we can see Moore and Parkhouse developing their creative skills through such experiments.

February 1991 saw the publication of The A1 True Life Bikini Confidential, which contained 'Our Factory Fortnight'. Again we can see evidence of Moore and Parkhouse's interest in experimenting with styles. They adopt the conventions of British children's story papers where an image is complemented with a text box located beneath it. This form predated comic strips with dialogue balloons popularised by titles like The Dandy in the 1930s and 1940s, although both forms would co-exist for a few years until the balloon style took over completely. This story is told from Reth's perspective and documents a family holiday in the fictional resort of Scrinton, in which Raoul eats a monkey, Festus moonbathes, and Reth's Action Ears figure creates havoc in a Little Chef.

In 1992 Tundra Press, a US publisher founded by Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Co-Creator Kevin Eastman, collected all of the Bojeffries episodes in a trade paperback edition that also contained some interesting extras: an introduction by comedian Lenny Henry; cut outs of the Bojeffies' greenhouse, Festus' face, and Ginda, complete with clothes; finally, a recipe for German Shepherd pie rounded out the collection, the last time the series was printed. Tundra ceased operations the following year.

Despite a run of bad publishing history luck, new rumours are again circulating about a reprinting. There is also talk of new story, set in modern times so that Moore and Parkhouse can reveal what happened to the Bojeffries family. Perhaps this will allow the series to be rediscovered and, hopefully, one of the weirdest British comic series ever produced will finally achieve wider recognition. ●


SEX.
SEX
SEX
SMOTTLED ENGRUTTED THOU BE! YEA — AND THRICE THUS!
AND SO BEGONE, CORRODOROUS NELLY - VIPER!
IT'S NO GOOD TALKING TO HIM, HE'S SENILE!
DAD!
ZELIT!
DAD, DAD, WE DON'T NEED ANY MORE GERANIUMS...
GINDA! NOW I WON'T HAVE YOU CALLING YOUR GRANDFATHER...
HE'S SENILE! I TOLD YOU HE WAS SENILE. EVERY THING'S GERANIUMS WITH HIM. I'M GOING INDOORS FOR A CUP OF TEA AND A BISCUIT
HE ISN'T SENILE MY LOVE.. HE'S JUST A BIT... WELL, Y'KNOW... OVER EVOLVED.
HMM... I COULD FANCY A CUP OF TEA AND A BISCUIT MESELF. COME TO THINK
TT! LOOK AT BLOODY RAOUL
AND SO THEY WENT INSIDE FOR A CUP OF TEA..
AND A BISCUIT
THEY LISTENED TO "TOP OF THE FORM" AND THE GARDEN GREW GRADUALLY SILVER, DURAGLITED BY MOONLIGHT..
AND AT FIVE AND TWENTY TO NINE TREVOR INCHMALE WAS VISITED BY A BREATHTAKING INSIGHT INTO THE MYSTERIES OF HIS EXISTENCE
I NEVER WANTED TO BE A RENTMAN ANYWAY

MY COMICY SATURDAY

BY CRANSTON MCMILLAN

Grandmother was unbelievably strict, the complete, total picture of a Dickensian disciplinarian. The granny from hell, always there with a scowl, a criticism or a belt round the ear, and she just seemed to hate everything that I liked. Pocket money was always a bone of extreme contention, the weekly spends that I was given were under absolutely no circumstances to be wasted on comics. Comics were quite simply rubbish and on top of that they were for kids: what a silly old bat. It had probably skipped her attention that I was 10 years old and therefore to all intents and purposes "A Kid", and just what on earth did she expect me to spend my pocket money on, Bubble gum maybe, sweets, a box of Bengal matches or possibly a bamboo cane from the local hardware store, or maybe just save it all up and never spend it, be a tight fisted old meanie like her. I'm quite sure it broke her heart every week when I collected my shiny 10 p piece from my Grandad and the equally shiny but somewhat smaller 5p coin from her.

To be fair, although a derisory sum of cash nowadays, fifteen pence was actually a fairly decent splodge of wonga for a young lad back in 1972, but it just didn't go far enough. The problem was the large selection of comics on offer; too much choice and not enough money. They really were great uncomplicated days; we just did not appreciate it at the time.

Five pence would almost always go on Commando. Like all young lads back then I was a war lover. The realities of armed conflict could just not be fully comprehended, knowledge of WW2 was gleaned from movies and TV shows such as The Great Escape, 633 Squadron, Von Ryan's Express and Colditz. Commando appealed to every little gung ho fibre of my mind, great British heroes fighting the wicked boche and the vicious sneaky Japs. I loved every single thing about Commando; it was the ultimate boy's comic, small, compact, and easy to slip into the duffle coat pocket: one epic 64 page story that you could really sink your teeth into, and boy those artwork covers were absolutely fantastic. Even the titles of stories, The 8.15 to Glory, Wall of Death and Jackson's Private Army had the ring of magic. Commando, still with us in 2009 is a slightly different, mellower beast these days; maybe I'm just getting older.

Gran hated commando with a fiery passion, "the war finished years ago", she would carp "wasting good money on this rubbish". There really did not seem to be anything that she did like, but total hatred was reserved for one of my all time favourites: Pocket Chiller Library.

I had always been a horror fan, I can't really say when it started, but it was probably when I spent a weekend with an Aunt and Uncle and wickedly convinced them that I was allowed to stay up late every Saturday night to see Don't Watch Alone. That particular week it was the Karloff Bride of Frankenstein, and pathetic as it may seem I remember just about every detail of that night. After the film it was right off to bed, and the minute the light went out I was totally petrified. Suffice to say that after that experience I just could not get enough horror: Hammer films, Universals, Pan Horror stories, DC House of Mystery, Charlton's Haunted and The Many Ghosts of Doctor Graves, I merrily soaked up the lot. Pocket Chiller Library though was top of the division, just like a dream that had came true. Again, like Commando a neat pocket digest, but most importantly it was a Horror comic. Chiller was another five pence, but it never seemed to be easy to get. I remember when my local newsagent had 3 new issues at once and I greedily bought the trio. In an instant my pocket money was gone creating one very, very happy boy and one very angry Gran. She placed an outright ban on Pocket Chiller that day; the fact that I had spent "3 Good Shillings" doubled with the sight of

some lurid cover art was just too much for the old girl. Banning it just made it all the more precious, and I still adore the comic after all this time.

Nowadays I rarely watch television. I fell out of love with the telly quite a while back, too many channels, too much rubbish. It was not always that way though, I was a total telly fiend as a youngster: The Saint, Mission Impossible, Danger Man, The Prisoner, Doctor Who, (still great) Land of the Giants, Wow, TV was really something then, and its not just looking at the past trough rosy tinted nostalgic specs. Watching some of these shows again in recent years, what becomes apparent is the high standard of writing, acting and directing that was prevalent in television at the time, the audience was not pandered too or taken for granted, something we have seen all too much of in recent years.

With Gerry Anderson
STINGRAY • FIREBALL XL5 • SUPERCAR
TV21
CENTURY
ADVENTURE IN THE 21st CENTURY
No. 1 UNIVERSE EDITION
EVERY WEDNESDAY
DATELINE
STINGRAY LOST!
FREE INSIDE! TOP SECRET CODE BOOK!
Send Secret Messages with the new IDENTICODE!
Your chance to become a SPECIAL AGENT! FREE INSIDE!
TITAN TERROR FISH ATTACKS WASP VESSEL
Steve Zodiac Dead?
Package of Death-Part Four
Hawaii Five-O
IF ANYONE SPEAKS TO YOU, IGNORE THEM, UNDERSTAND?
I UNDERSTAND!

For the hardened telly addict the only comic that would suffice was the brilliant TV Action. Sure, other comics had strips of TV Shows, but TV Action had something special. The Persuaders, The Protectors, Mission Impossible, UFO, Alias Smith and Jones and most importantly Doctor Who all had their own stories; and apart from the downside of the much despised Hawaii Five O, TV Action was a weekly must.

The comic had grown out of the popular Countdown comic, but for me was even Action was far, far better. Countdown had in a way been a replacement for TV21, so tended to be more Gerry Anderson based. Looking back now, TV Action really didn't last all that long, but it holds a place as one of my all time favourites. Other comics, namely Look In continued with Television show comics, but nothing was ever quite the same.

Earlier this year, my son had a few days absence from school due to a very mysterious bug that seemed to magically disappear after a long dreaded maths exam had passed by. His first day off was spent watching Raiders of the Lost Ark followed by a lengthy Playstation session; he rounded off with Batman Begins before finding his appetite for a very hearty dinner. It set me wondering about how we coped with the monotony of the 1970's, what with only 3 TV channels, no video/DVD and no Games consoles. Yet I clearly remember 6 glorious weeks, free from the horrors of school, stuck at home with a broken wrist and collar bone. I ploughed through my comic collection, happily devoured my Target Doctor Who novelizations , watched my two Charlie Chaplin films and my 200ft edit of the Peter Cushing Dalek Invasion Earth film on Grandads projector and won the FA cup with Bolton Wanderers playing one armed, one man Subbuteo. There simply were not enough hours in the day, and not one minute was wasted. I did however pine for new comics, but was not allowed out on my own for the first few weeks, and on top of this completely unfair imprisonment Gran also decided that I wouldn't be needing any pocket money as I wasn't going anywhere to spend it. Mean, mean, mean, Well, Not quite.

A few weeks into my extended break, I'll never forget when she returned from her weekly shopping trip with the biggest pile of comics I ever had at one time: The Dandy, The Beano, Mighty World of Marvel, Bunty (yes Bunty) The Topper, The Beezer, 4 Commandos, The Victor, there must have been about 20 titles and pride of place at the top of the pile was a beautiful Pocket Chiller Library - The Bat. I think she must just have bought one of everything in the shop; I was totally over the moon.

Most of my comics and annuals from my youth were given away or disposed of in one way or another, and like so many others it is in later life that we start to rebuild, maybe in an attempt to recapture a little sense of long past childhood. I'm not particularly sentimental, but I still have that old copy of The Bat, a little tatty maybe, a bit brown and dog eared, but still there as a poignant little reminder of a wonderful day during a quite wonderful time.

As for Gran, well she passed on many years ago. She really was an amazing woman, full of contradictions, cruel put downs and blatant two facedness maybe, but that was always on things of what could be termed as frivolous. At all times though she was honest, kind and loving, she carried with her a great integrity; the perfect substitute mother for a parentless child. Never a day goes by when I don't think of her and I miss her wisdom madly. The comics are always with me and recently I've been looking at some lovely issues of TV Action on e bay, and over my shoulder I hear her far off voice, "grown man buying comics it's a total disgrace". Thanks Gran. ●

We each have a personal real-life comic hero. An artist or writer who brought something new to the way we enjoyed comics... this time around* Glenn B Fleming *looks at the late, but truly great ...

Joe Colquhoun. Ever heard of him? Well, you may not have heard the name (shame on you!) but you will have seen his artwork. Roy of the Rovers. *Heard of him? Of course you have. Well, Joe was the very first artist to illustrate the strip (using the pen-name 'Stewart Colwyn')which appeared in* Tiger *on 11 September 1954. Joe also wrote the scrips for four years after taking over from original scripter Frank Pepper. And Joe hated football. In between his first published work (*Carver of the Islands *for* Jungle Trails *in 1951) and his death in 1987, Joe turned in arguably the most consistantly brilliant artwork ever seen in British comics. Arguably? Yes. Brilliant? Definitely.*

JOE COLQUHOUN

Joe Colquhoun was born in Harrow in Middlesex in 1927. He had not always wanted to be a comic artist although that would soon change. As a child he would spend most of his spare time drawing in an old ledger book, usually alone. He'd write and draw his own adventure stories. The comics available to him in those days were *Comic Cuts*, *Wizard* and *Hotspur*. Those titles were text led with no or few illustrations on their pages. Joe's mentor was the late, truly great Alex Raymond and the young, maturing Joe had high aspirations of emulating his hero–a tough act to follow! Raymond's use of cross hatching, ratio to black and white and line economy would later be evident throughout Joe's style.

Joe's career–like so many others–was about to be delayed before it had had a chance to take off, by the Second World War. Joe, however, joined the Royal Navy before he could be conscripted. Joe served on various ships around the world, though he never saw action. Joe enjoyed the Navy and had at one point considered a career on the high seas, but his desire to draw got the better of him. I guess we should all be grateful for that. After de-mob in 1947 he enroled at the Kingston School of Art, this time for a prolonged course on book illustration. Breaking into the field of comic art in the harsh financial post war climate of

October 14, 1961
FREE inside! Smashing Football League Ladders
WITH 129 NAME TABS OF LEAGUE FOOTBALL TEAMS
LION
Paddy Payne
WARRIOR OF THE SKIES
1940 BRITAIN WAS BESIEGED AND BATTERED BY THE VAST BOMBER FLEETS OF NAZI GERMANY'S LUFTWAFFE. THE ONE LINE OF DEFENCE WAS R.A.F. FIGHTER COMMAND. GALLANT YOUNG PILOTS DARED DEATH TO DEFEND THEIR COUNTRY — PILOTS LIKE PADDY PAYNE, WHO ONE MORNING WAS LEADING HIS SQUADRON OVER THE SOUTH COAST.
CONTROL TO HAWKS' LEADER — MANY BANDITS APPROACHING VECTOR K FIVE SPEED TWO FIFTY — HEIGHT FIFTEEN THOUSAND — ENGAGE AND DESTROY — GOOD LUCK!
ROLLS ROYCE MERLIN ENGINES HOWLED UNDER FULL BOOST, THE FIGHTERS FOLLOWED PADDY'S NEW COURSE — TEN MINUTES PASSED. THEN
LEADER TO HAWKS — BANDITS SIX O'CLOCK HIGH! GO STRAIGHT DOWN OUT OF THE SUN FORMATION ATTACK THROUGH THE MESSERSCHMITT UMBRELLA! FOLLOW ME — TALLY HO!
A BLACK-CROSSED ME 109 SLID INTO PADDY'S SIGHTS AND EIGHT WING MOUNTED BROWNINGS STABBED FLAME AND DIPPING LEAD
ONE MORE FOR JOSLING'S FLAP!
PADDY HURTLED INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE NAZI FIGHTERS!
ENGINES HOWLING HOARSELY, THE NAZI HUNTERS LANCED DOWN — THREADING FIERY ARROWS OF TRACER INTO THE CLOSE FLYING LANCASTERS
UPPER GUNNER TO SKIPPER: HERE COME THE VULTURES — AND THEY SURE LOOK HUNGRY!
WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO BEAT 'EM OFF IF WE CAN HOLD THIS TIGHT FORMATION
BUT THIS WAS GERMANY'S FINEST NIGHT FIGHTER SQUADRON — AND SOON ONE LUMBERING BOMBER LURCHED OUT OF THE TIGHT BRITISH BOX. IT WAS AS DISASTER LOOMED LARGE THAT PADDY PAYNE ARRIVED!
A DEFT TOUCH ON THE CONTROLS — A BREATH ROBBING ROLL — AND PADDY'S SIGHTS CENTRED ON THE SECOND TARGET.
HEY, SKIPPER — WHAT THE HECK'S GOING ON? ONE GUN HAS GONE TRIGGER HAPPY. HE'S TEARING HIS OWN OUTFIT TO SHREDS!
IF YOU WAS A SCRAPPER REMEMBER GOERING'S SCRAP-HEAP
BUT IN ONE BULLET-LASHED LANCASTER, A CERTAIN PILOT'S UNSEEN HAND PUCKED AT TWO FUEL SWITCHES. AS THE PLANE'S PORT MOTOR'S COUGHED AND DIED, THE MIGHTY AIRCRAFT SLID OUT OF FORMATION
CAPTAIN TO CREW. TWO ENGINES DAMAGED I CAN'T HOLD HER UP. I'LL HAVE TO CRASH-LAND HER!
AFTER TONIGHT'S FAILURE MY MISSION IN ENGLAND IS FINISHED. NOW I MUST REPORT TO GERMAN INTELLIGENCE H.Q
NEXT WEEK: FLAMES IN THE NIGHT SKY!

the late 1940's was not, according to many of the time, the best move for a career. Despite being a 'war hero' (something that Joe never claimed) work was still hard to come by and many people were struggling just to get through the day. Joe began the usual knocking on doors looking for work. Seeing an advert for comic artists, Joe sent in samples and got work from two ex-GI's, who were producing 'Carver of the Islands'. The work did not pay well, but the experience was invaluable. Later, Joe would state that seeing his artwork published was like having sex for the first time–something you would never forget. Landing 'Carver of the Islands' was his first big break. He took it and never looked back and though he didn't make any real money, Joe honed his craft and learned to draw fast. He stayed there eight months.

Managing to get an 'interview' with the editor of *Eagle* was another turning point for Joe but that didn't work either–he was quickly despatched to the Amalgamated Press where he lied by telling that editor that he also wrote stories. His first story was not up to the standard required, but the editor and Joe thrashed it into a usable four pager.

Then–just when he thought his feet were under the table he was relegated to work on the lesser title: *Champion*. Keeping heart and improving all the time, Joe pusued his dream. And it paid off. After more ups and downs, Joe finally became a mainstay and worked for IPC magazines for the next 30 years.

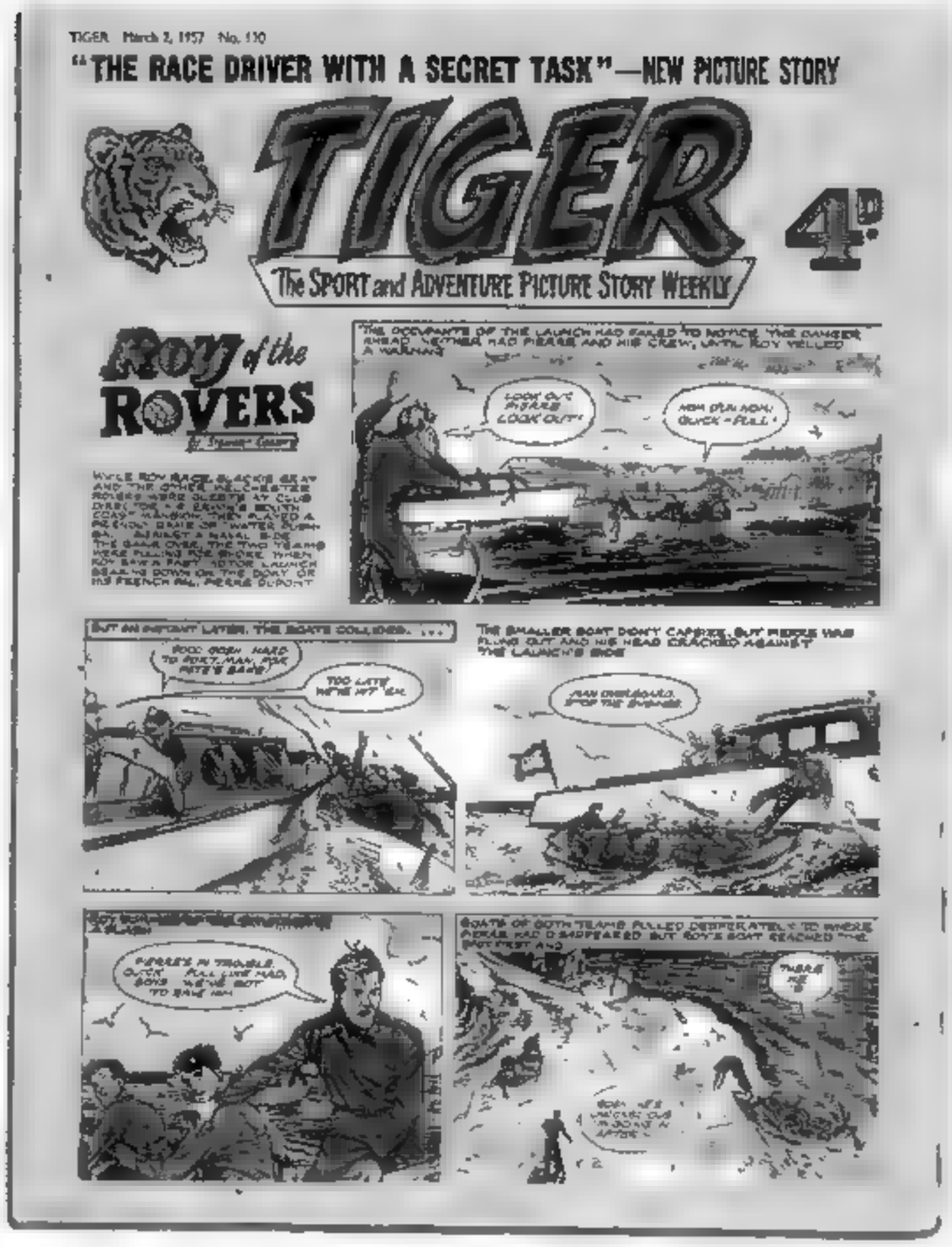
He worked exclusively on *Lion* for two years and later it's sister publication *Tiger*, working on the aforementioned football ace 'Roy of the Rovers'. Working on Roy was not a happy time for Joe, but, being the professional he was, he kept at it and produced some of the most exciting stories of the time. He spent the rest of the '60s working on 'shorter' stories for *Lion* (*Paddy Payne, Fighter Ace*) and *Roy of the Rovers* for *Tiger*. Joe drew Roy >

JOE'S RENDITION OF PAT MILLS' 'CHARLEY'S WAR' (BATTLE, DECEMBER 1981)

2 SPLENDID FOOTBALL TEAM PHOTO CARDS
LION
Paddy Payne
WARRIOR OF THE SK
JUNE 7TH 1917. AFTER TWO YEARS OF PLANNING, THE SECRET BRITISH TUNNELS BENEATH THE WESTERN FRONT WERE BLOWN UP! A MILLION POUNDS OF EXPLOSIVE WERE DETONATED IN THE GREATEST MAN-MADE EXPLOSION THE WORLD HAD EVER SEEN!
IT IS THE GOTTERDAMMERUNG! THE END OF THE WORLD!

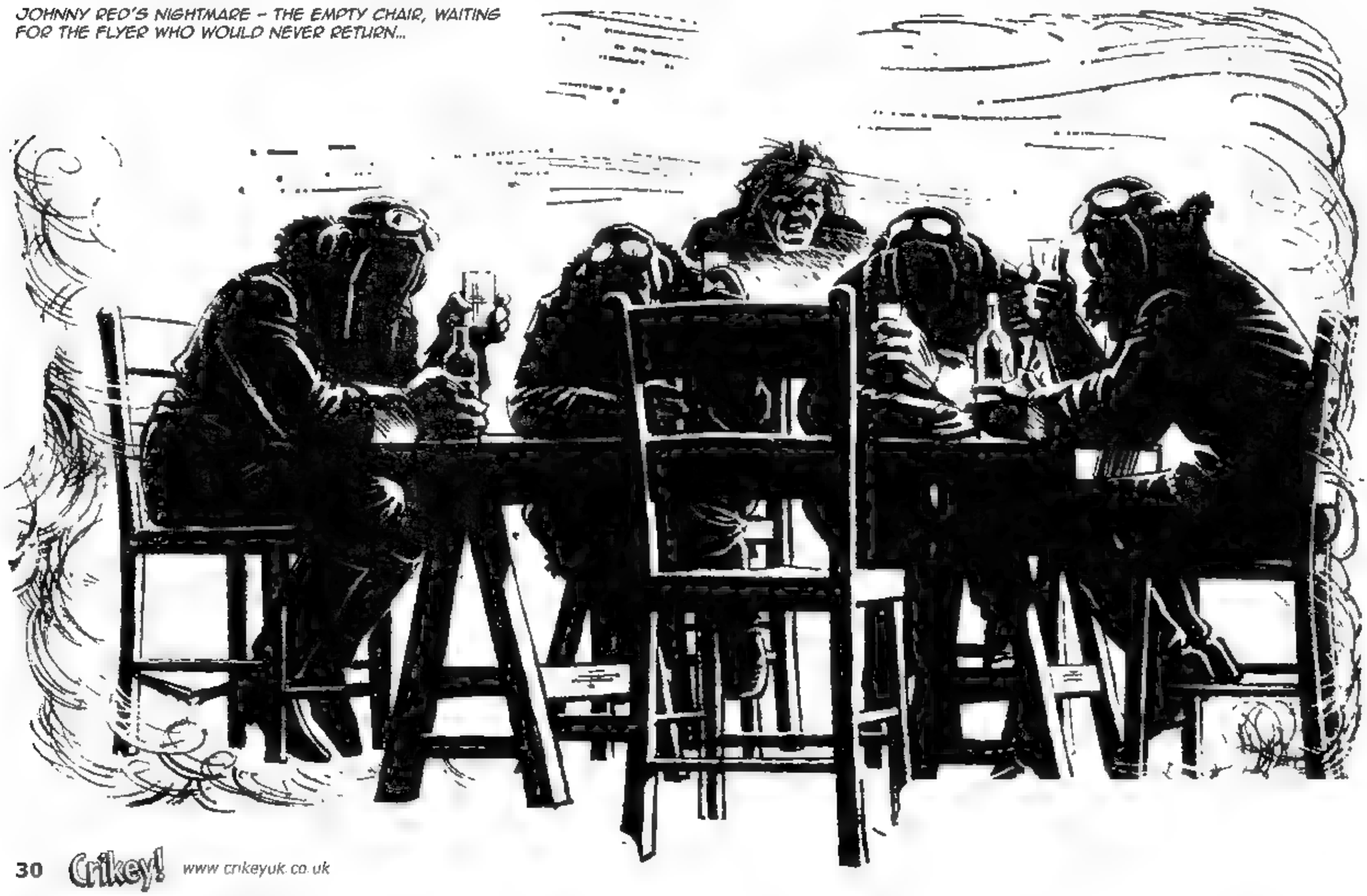
for the next four and half years, before being replaced by Paul Trevillion. Joe was glad to finally get a 'transfer' and finally leave Melchester and Roy and his football to the capable hands of others. Though now free of the soccer scene, Joe experienced many more highs and lows. More and more artists were being used from the continent, work there being produced faster and at a lower cost. This impacted on Joe and other British artists at the time.

As the Seventies dawned Joe began working on humourous Comics like 'Buster' and 'Cor!'. Former publisher Dez Skinn, among others, remembers Joe with great affection, calling him a wonderful person as well as a wonderful artist. This seems to be a common thought amongst his friends, family and peers. Skinn had worked with Colquhoun as editor on *Kid Chameleon* and *Zarga - Man of Mystery* and knew him well. Joe stayed with *Buster* for six years and drew a variety of strips. These strips included *The Goodies*, *Sammy Brewster's Ski-Board Squad* and *Sam's City Jungle*. When Colquhoun moved away from humour, is was to the more deadly side of life - war. Joe drew many stories for the pocket sized *Battle Picture Library* over the next couple of years, amongst them 'Johnny Red', where he illustrated the exploits of a British fighter pilot on active service with the Soviet Union during the Second World War. Joe created the 'look' of this character. In 1978, then Editor Dave Hunt put Joe and writer Pat Mills together. A true master stroke· if there ever was one. The irony is that Joe wasn't sure if he wanted the job as he couldn't figure how anybody could make a decent story out of the mind numbing experience of trench warfare. He was wrong, of course, and his art was as influential as Mills' writing proved to be. Between them they produced one the most enduring comic series in British comics history : Charley's War, which is possibly Joe's greatest contribution to British comics. Pat Mills' brilliant script and characters would not have been able to so fully come to life without Joe's readiness to render the utmost detail in his illustrations. Battle Editor Terry Magee would say later that Joe's involvement was never less that one


TIGER March 2, 1957 No. 110
"THE RACE DRIVER WITH A SECRET TASK"—NEW PICTURE STORY
TIGER
4p
The SPORT and ADVENTURE PICTURE STORY WEEKLY
Roy of the ROVERS

THE EARLY DAYS OF A FOOTBALLING LEGEND, AS ILLUSTRATED BY JOE

JOHNNY REO'S NIGHTMARE - THE EMPTY CHAIR, WAITING FOR THE FLYER WHO WOULD NEVER RETURN...



hundred percent, regularly spending a full five working days to complete one episode - script and blank paper to three pages of fully rendered, beautiful artwork. Joe's dedication to such detailed backgrounds and accurate uniforms and weaponry meant he didn't produce as much artwork as other artists and so his pay was much less, but the love was there. Pat Mills considered Joe an artistic genius who received neither the recompence nor the praise he deserved for his work. Indeed, Mills said later that he consciously followed Joe's 'work' path: to make sure that he (Mills) always achieved satifaction for himself first and enjoyed his work. Mills rarely spoke with Joe over the phone about a story or script as neither wanted to lose the 'magic' their individual talents brought to the work. Indeed, Colquhoun was quite at ease to let Mills go where he wanted with Charley's War and the strip is better for the lack of egos within the partnership. Mills often wonders how Joe managed to illustrate the death and destruction shown in *Charley's War* on such a regular basis and not be overwhelmed by it. The truth is that Colquhoun was, indeed, very often overwhelmed by the stories in such a way he would not want to look at them when they were finished and published. According to Mills, only Joe Calqhoun could have produced the artwork for this series. And I'm not about to argue with that.

Joe Colquhoun never saw any of his artwork returned from his various publishers, though it must be said that it was not the done practice to return originals much less ask for them. He must have produced many hundreds if not thousands of pages. Artwork was not returned to artists and writers until the very late '80s–after Joe's >

EXCITING WAR-IN-THE-AIR PICTURE STORY!
FIVE STAR WEEKLY
LION.
PADDY PAINE
OPERATION MOSQUITO
SO EVEN THE RUSSIANS HAVE WASHED THEIR HANDS OF ME NOW! I CAME ALL THE WAY BACK HERE JUST TO FIND OUT THAT I HAVEN'T A FRIEND IN THE WORLD!

JOE'S DEPICTION OF ACTION MADE HIM AN OBVIOUS CHOICE AS ARTIST FOR BATTLE'S 'JOHNNY RED' (BATTLE, AUGUST 1987)

death - and so he was never able to take advantage of his arts worth on the open market. Mills is still quite upset about this, almost 20 years after Joe's death and is often outspoken about the situation, claiming that neither he nor Joe received reprint royalties from *Charley's War* when the series was published in book form. As before, Joe was content to let others decide matters of finance - often to his detriment. Some time later Mills tried to get Colquhoun to move with him to *2000AD*, offering him the strip 'Slaine'. Joe turned him down, stating he would rather draw *Charley's War*, albeit with another writer and that he was nearing retirement anyway.

Joe's style is easily recognisable, whether Paddy Payne, Charley Bourne or Johnny Red. His artwork is gritty, yet somehow still retains the humor of cartoon. This juxstaposition is very unsettling - in *Charley's war* a cartoony figure with a jokey face falls dead to a single round from a sniper, ending up in the mud and bullets of the Somme, his pals distraught around him. The characters in that series were 'real' - and we cared.

Though he would have preferred to do more colour work, Joe worked mainly in black and white with pencil, brush and pen. In my opinion, his superb line work tended to be lost in the little colour work we saw as was his wonderful use of cross hatching. Joe would first pencil the layout and rough frames on the artboard after sketching preliminary drawings, or thumbnails, on scrap paper (anybody got any of those?!). Then Joe would finish the pencils, 'tightening them up', before picking up his brush to start the inking. Unusually, he would ink in the boldest lines first, moving almost backwards (in application) to thinner and thinner line work. He would brush in the boldest lines on all three pages and then begin the process again throughout the week using a thinner and thinner line until the strip was finished. He

JOE REMEMBERED - 1

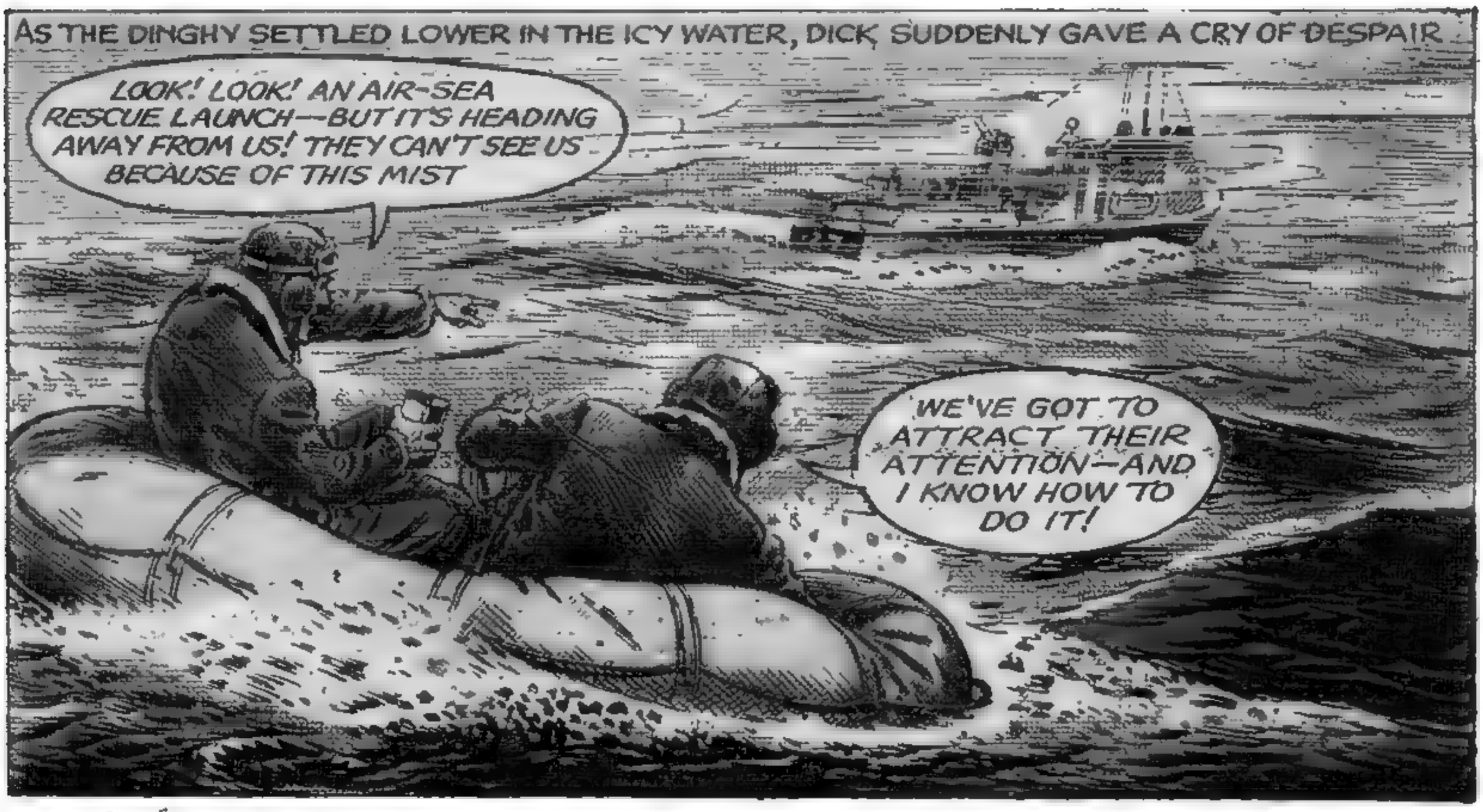
Possibly one of the UK's most under-rated adventure comics artists, Joe Colquhoun was a real gentleman too! I had the good fortune to work with him on a range of IPC strips during the early 1970s, following his epic run as artist on *Roy of the Rovers* for *Tiger*. For *Cor!!* he added a touch of daring to the humour in the full colour centerespread Kid Chameleon (written by boys' adventure stalwart Scott Goodall). When *Cor!!* merged into *Buster*, Joe made the jump across although Kid Chameleon was by then a distant memory.

Perhaps artists are best remembered when associated with specific stories, but Joe flailed somewhat during his pre-*Charley's War Buster* days, always competant and reliable, but perhaps uninspired by the likes of *Sam's City Jungle* or *Sammy Brewster's Ski-Board Squad* (hey, it was prophetic! We didn't know back then they'd finally be called skateboards!) and *Zarga, Man of Mystery* - perhaps best remembered for the time Joe took a holiday and I got my fanzine cover artist and good buddy possibly his first pro work when Dave Gibbons filled the gap.

But my lasting memory about Joe Colquhoun (pronounced Co-hoon, by the way) isn't his wonderful art or his quiet and gentle manners. It's his colour originals, and-the antithesis of Frank Bellamy's meticulous "what you see is what will print" approach-how he'd audaciously test his colour mixes down the side of the original art board, a psychedlic swirl of overlapping brush strokes running from top to bottom. I always dreaded the day the engravers would fail to mask it off!

Dez Skinn

(ABOVE LEFT): 'MAYHEM'S COLUMN' MASK 25
(BELOW): PADDY PAYNE, LION 368, MARCH 1959


AS THE DINGHY SETTLED LOWER IN THE ICY WATER, DICK SUDDENLY GAVE A CRY OF DESPAIR
LOOK! LOOK! AN AIR-SEA RESCUE LAUNCH—BUT IT'S HEADING AWAY FROM US! THEY CAN'T SEE US BECAUSE OF THIS MIST
WE'VE GOT TO ATTRACT THEIR ATTENTION—AND I KNOW HOW TO DO IT!

JOE REMEMBERED - 2

Some years ago I was in the offices of Marvel UK and the publisher asked me who my favourite comic book hero was. No hero coming to my mind, the publisher prompted me. Was it the Incredible Hulk? Spider-man? Captain America? I was still lost for words and the publisher was looking rather impatient, so I eventually said the first name which came into my head–*Charley's War*. "Never heard of him," he replied. I had chosen my own anti-war serial, not because Charley was my character, but for two important reasons: firstly, because he was the only genuine hero I could think of and secondly, because he was so memorably and uniquely drawn by Joe–an astonishing artistic feat which has never been repeated and is still not fully recognised.

Today, I would have said with equal conviction, *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi because, once again, like Joe, she has that rare ability to depict a genuine and entertaining character who is truly heroic and therefore reaches our souls. The reason these two stories stand almost alone is because their subject matter is incredibly difficult to draw successfully. No-one else matches Joe's work on *Charley's War* and also on *Johnny Red*, where his scenes of the heroic struggles of the ordinary people of Leningrad linger in the mind long after you close the pages of Battle comic.

Joe was content to have a number one story with *Charley's War* for the duration of its long run in *Battle*; to find favour with a mainstream audience of some 170,000 mainstream readers; and never sought and never received recognition from comic fans. He enjoyed the work not for the money (his detailed style was highly uneconomic), but purely for the pleasure of drawing it and that makes him a true artist. I was disappointed his talent was not recognized by fandom, because, for me, he is Britain's greatest black and white comic artist, bar none. I guess because he was not drawing fantasy or drawing in a style that might find favour in America. In France, where there is a greater appreciation of traditional stories and storytelling (Giraud's *Blueberry*, for instance), he'd have doubtless received a medal, but in the UK: nothing. Yet today, Joe's work on *Charley's War* is more popular than ever, it's printed in an ongoing series of luxurious hardbacks, and many 'outsiders' I show it to tell me, "I like this, because I can understand it. I can follow what's going on. And it's actually saying something."

My disappointment at the lack of recognition for Joe's genius was finally overcome at a recent gathering of *Charley's War* fans in the Cartoon Museum. There were two separate, original readers from military families who came up to me and said that they would have joined the army but changed their minds after reading *Charley's War*. Without it, they might have been added to the lists of the fallen in Northern Ireland, Iraq or Afghanistan. I reckon you got your medal, Joe.

Pat Mills

would employ a mid range brush for faces and such and add the blacks, shading and uniform details last, using a dip pen with a very fine nib. Any whites that were needed would be put down in gouache. It was not usual for Joe to work into the weekend to finish up these details.

In 1982 Joe suffered a heart attack. After some time recuperating, he was back working as steadily as before as *Charley's War* continued into the Second World War. Joe's final strip finally came to an end on the 4 October 1986. A year later Joe died. He produced ten one-off stories for 'Mask' in 1987. His last piece of work was a story called 'Mayhem's Column' which appeared in *Mask* issue 25, dated 26 September 1987.

Even now, more than 20 years after his death, Joe Colquhoun is still largely an unsung hero of the comic world, living through the times when credits for who-did-what-and-when hardly ever appeared in British comics.

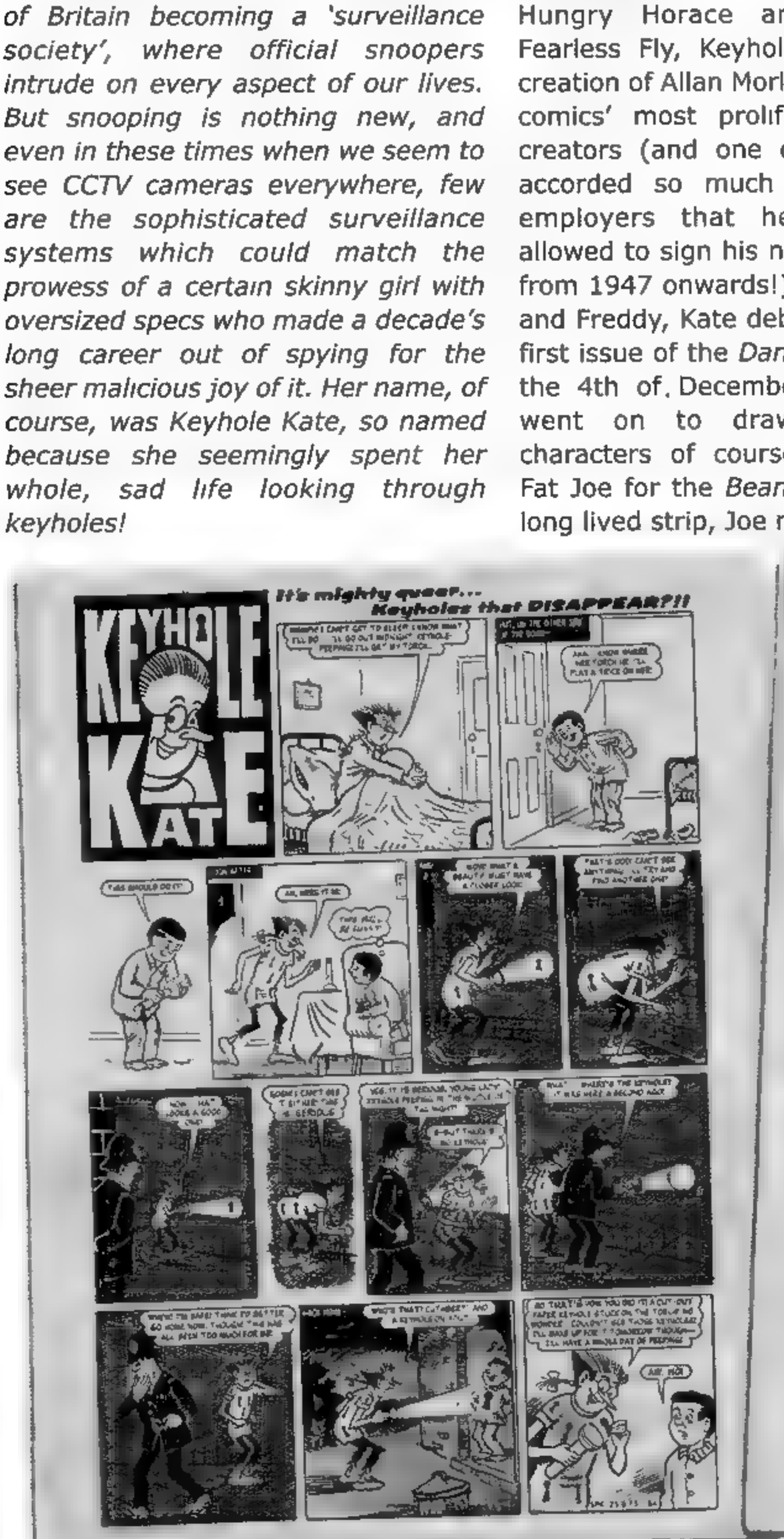
But we know who he was. And we know what he did. ●

THROUGH THE KEYHOLE: THE STORY OF KEYHOLE KATE

BY TONY INGRAM

Much has been made in recent years of Britain becoming a 'surveillance society', where official snoopers intrude on every aspect of our lives. But snooping is nothing new, and even in these times when we seem to see CCTV cameras everywhere, few are the sophisticated surveillance systems which could match the prowess of a certain skinny girl with oversized specs who made a decade's long career out of spying for the sheer malicious joy of it. Her name, of course, was Keyhole Kate, so named because she seemingly spent her whole, sad life looking through keyholes!

Like her DC Thomson stable-mates Hungry Horace and Freddy the Fearless Fly, Keyhole Kate was the creation of Allan Morley, one of British comics' most prolific and talented creators (and one of the very few accorded so much respect by his employers that he was actually allowed to sign his name on his work from 1947 onwards!) and like Horace and Freddy, Kate debuted in the very first issue of the *Dandy*, way back on the 4th of December 1937. Morley went on to draw many other characters of course (including Big Fat Joe for the *Beano*; not a terribly long lived strip, Joe nonetheless hung around for decades after being co-opted into Lord Snooty's gang) but aside from Hungry Horace, none were quite as successful or as long lived as the snooping Kate! She had a lengthy run in the *Dandy* before resurfacing (along with Horace and also the *Beano*'s Pansy Potter the Strongman's Daughter) in the newly launched *Sparky Comic* on 23rd January 1965. By this time, the nosey nightmare's adventures were being drawn by George Drysdale (as was Horace), Allan Morley having died in September 1960 (he had effectively retired from comics in 1951, after his final 'Magic Lollipops' strip appeared



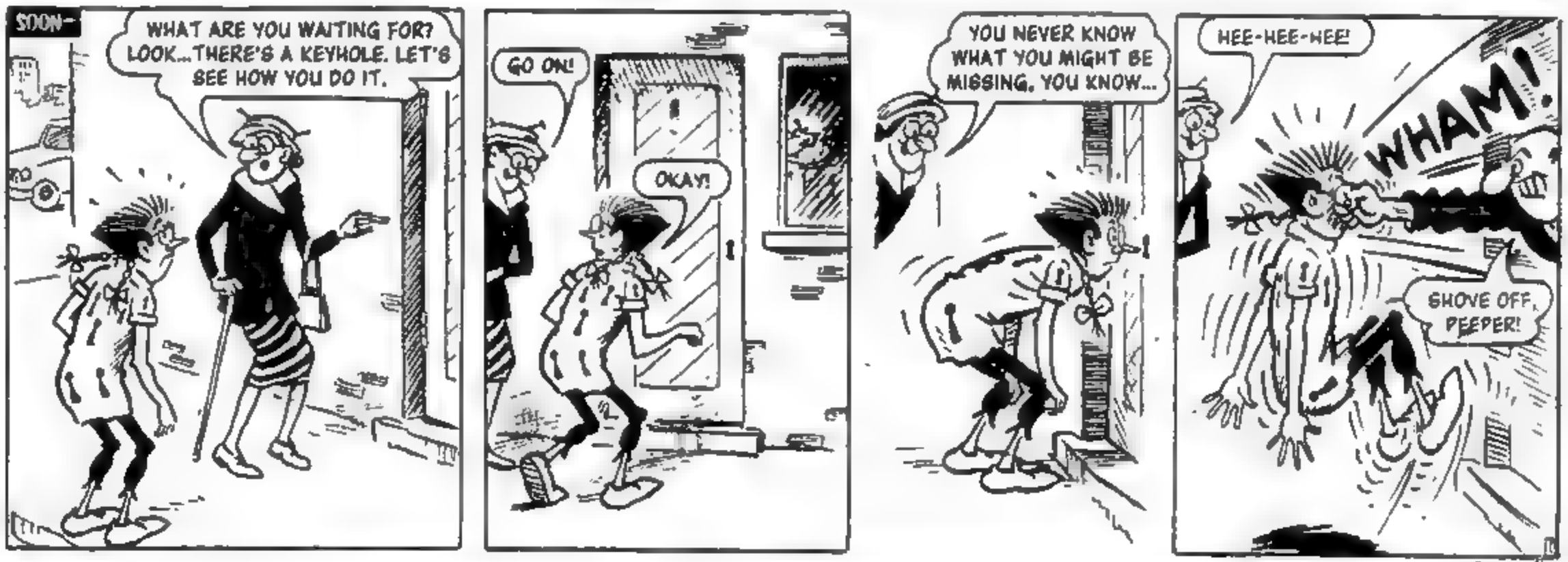
in the *Beano* #475 on August 25th of that year).

Kate's character underwent a change as the years passed. In her early appearances, she would frequently display a vindictive streak, but by the later strips she was peeping simply because that was what she did; in one strip, she peers through a keyhole to watch her favourite TV show on someone else's telly despite the fairly obvious fact that she could just as easily have watched it in comfort on her own set at home! Possibly, Kate had some sort of rather specialised obsessive disorder? If so, it won her few friends as she was well known for hers spying, prying ways by neighbours who would not hesitate to exact revenge on her, or drive her off their property with hurled missiles. On the whole, the distinctive orange keyhole patterned dress she habitually wore probably didn't help her to keep a low profile for her nefarious activities!

KEYHOLE KATE
1991
Since her first appearance in The Dandy 60 years ago Keyhole Kate hasn't been further than the locksmith's shop down the road, but when she made a comeback in the early '90s in one Dandy Summer Special she found herself in an area of the U.S.A. called... Florida Keys!
THERE'S BOUND TO BE LOTS OF KEYHOLES IN THIS PLACE.
WELCOME TO FLORIDA KEYS
I'LL SEE IF THAT'S GOT A LOCK.
AIN'T NO LOCKS HERE. WE GET OUR FUN BIG GAME FISHING.
I'VE GOT LOCK JAW!
Kate goes fishing.
WE'LL HEAD FOR THE OLD WRECKS.
PLENTY OF OLD WRECKS ON BOARD!
Then—
WOW! A KEYHOLE IN THE CABIN DOOR.
MUST TAKE A PEEK.
Watch this line, folks.
Just then
HI! I'M MARLIN MUNRO!
WAAGH! GIRL OVERBOARD!
I'VE GOT THAT AWFUL SINKING FEELING.
But then
YAHOO! I'VE FOUND DAVY JONES' LOCKER.

Sadly, Kate vanished from *Sparky*'s pages with the issue dated May 25th 1974, replaced the following week by the unmemorable and short lived Herman's Horrorscope, a not particularly funny strip about a horoscope obsessed kid in star shaped glasses whose attempts to follow his astrologer's predictions inevitably landed him in trouble (Herman, who completely failed to take the comics' readership by storm, was gone by August the same year). Allan Morley's legacy lived on in *Sparky*, though, in the rotund shape of Hungry Horace, who eventually outlasted *Sparky*, too (the comic folded in July 1977) and became instead a regular in the pages of *Topper*. Kate would periodically reappear over the years in annuals and specials, but has not so far recaptured her former fame.

Then again, she'd be getting on a bit, so she's probably the head of MI5 by now ... ●


SOON—
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? LOOK...THERE'S A KEYHOLE. LET'S SEE HOW YOU DO IT.
GO ON!
OKAY!
YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT YOU MIGHT BE MISSING, YOU KNOW...
HEE-HEE-HEE!
WHAM!
SHOVE OFF, PEEPER!

STAND BY FOR ACTION! WE ARE ABOUT TO LAUNCH...

BY JAMIE HAILSTONE

There was a time when the comic ruled supreme. It was a long time ago, admittedly. It was an era when there was no Internet and people still thought Wikipedia was a small Greek island, famed for its olives. You couldn't Google your favourite television series or buy the latest DVD boxset. If you missed the latest episode, that was it. There were no Sunday evening repeats or catch-up marathons. It was bloody awful.

Fortunately help was at hand in the shape of Gerry Anderson. In the mid 1960s, the master puppeteer saw a gap in the market and launched *TV Century 21*, which was full of strips based on his own shows. The first issue of *TV Century 21* hit newsagents on 23rd January 1965 and proved to be a massive success. The initial print-run of 750,000 flew out of the shops and within weeks it was selling almost a million copies a week.

It was the mother of all masterstrokes. Anderson's shows were massively popular. Fireball XL5 and Stingray had already gained a loyal following, and *TV Century 21* could start promoting another show that Anderson was now working on: Thunderbirds. At last, fans of the Supermarionation universe could see their heroes as they had never seen them before – no strings attached, if you pardon the pun.

This was no shoddy cash-in. *TV Century 21* was the real deal. Writers like Alan Fennell, who worked on both the Fireball XL5 and Stingray television series were drafted in and some of the finest comic artists of the 1960s, like Ron Embleton and Mike Noble were also recruited. The strips themselves were vibrant and action-packed.

It almost goes without saying, but not all the *TV Century 21* strips are still with us today. You would need a wallet the size of Marineville and the patience of Solomon to track them all down. Fortunately, comics historian Chris Bentley has tracked down many of them and reprinted them in three compilation volumes entitled *Century 21*.

The underwater antics of Captain Troy Tempest and Lieutenant George Lee 'Phones' Sheridan onboard Stingray were an obvious fit for *TV Century 21* and graced the cover of very first issue. The comic strip might not have the added bonus of Barry Gray's frenetic theme tune, but it was as explosive as the television series. You could also read it without having to endure Gary Miller croon 'Marina, Aqua Marina' at the end of each story, which in itself was a bonus.

Artists like Ron Embleton ensured that the strip looked exactly like the show. It was instantly recognisable and Troy Tempest still appeared to be

ALL ART BY RON EMBLETON

X20 TAKES HIS CHANCE...
I MUST WORK FAST...
COMMANDER SHORE WARDS OFF THE SHARKS...
PHONES...LOOK!
YEH! THE SEA BED'S CHURNED UP. COULD BE THERE WAS A BATTLE HERE...RECENTLY!

American actor James Garner's lovechild. The puppet of Marina was supposedly based on legendary French beauty Brigitte Bardot, but you would never know it from her fleeting appearances in the comic strip.

The new comic strip version of Stingray allowed the writers to take the adventures of WASP in some new directions. The hoverchair bound Commander Shore was able to play a slightly greater role, although love interest Marina often took something of a backseat for obvious reasons. Perhaps mute characters are hard to write dialogue for and besides, all that lovey-dovey stuff got in the way of the action. This could also explain why the love triangle between Troy, Marina and Atlanta is rarely mentioned in the comic strip.

It should also be pointed out that Commander Shore spends a great deal of time smoking cigars, a la Hannibal from the A-Team. He clearly loved it when an underwater plan came together.

The earliest tale to survive in its entirety is *The Haunting Of Station 17*, which originally ran in *TV Century 21* from issues 23 to 30. There are no prizes for guessing what the story is about. Written by Alan Fennell and drawn by Ron Embleton, this is one story that does exactly what it says on the tin. Tracking Station 17 is indeed haunted and the Stingray crew are sent in to investigate. It's not the most original story on Earth. You do rather expect 'Old Man Smithers' to turn up at some point, but Ron Embleton's art is bright, bold and it still looks good after all these years.

The underwater prison of Aquatraz was name checked in the very first episode of the Stingray television series, but never seen. All that changed with *Escape From Aquatraz*, which ran in *TV Century 21* from issues 31 to 44. When one of the world's strongest leaders, Marshal Ketov is captured and brought to the underwater world of Titanica, he is taken to Aquatraz and the Stingray crew must rescue him.

In case you hadn't spotted the reference – Aquatraz is based on the infamous American prison Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay. The US authorities used to brag that no prisoner had ever escaped from Alcatraz Island and lived to tell the tale. In a similar fashion, several Stingray characters remind the reader at the beginning of the story that no living thing has ever escaped from Aquatraz, either.

Suffice to say, all that changes when Troy Tempest and his gang mount a rescue mission and save Marshal Ketov from death by electric eel, which must win some brownie points for being the most environmentally-friendly death sentence in the world.

The storyline then goes for broke with Titan discovering the secrets of nuclear power and Commander Shore suspended from duties. Remarkably, for these strips the story has several subplots, all of which get resolved in a climatic finale.

Icebreaker, which ran from issues 45 to 51 could have been the story of the WASP Christmas party. It isn't. Instead, Stingray has to race to the Arctic to fight off aliens who are threatening to melt the ice cap. It predates the whole environmental debate by several decades and Troy Tempest manages to defeat the aliens by using a cunning mix of morse code and explosives. It was a rare foray >

away from the sea-based adventures that defined the series, but it also helped reinforce the environmental messages that behind Stingray.

The unfortunately-titled *Monster Weed Menace* (remember, this was the 1960s kids!) ran from issues 62 to 71. Anyone expecting a foray into Fabulous Furry Freak Brother's territory will be disappointed. Three canisters of special fast-growing seeds fall to earth from space and land in the ocean. Before you can say 'roll um easy', evil agent X20 and his master Titan become embroiled in a race against time with the Stingray crew as to who can get their hands on the canisters first.

This would be artist Ron Embleton's last work on Stingray and he genuinely does pull out all the stops to ensure that he goes out with a bang. Every character looks exactly as they do on television and the attention to detail is staggering.

By this point, *TV Century 21*'s art editor Dennis Hooper had taken over the scripting of Stingray from Alan Fennell and took the series in an even more gritty and action-packed direction. The last surviving tale is the epic 'Superjunk' series, which ran from issues 72 to 81. Superjunk sees the Stingray crew do battle with Toman Fang and his pirate hordes, who are terrorising the open seas. At one point, Bones is subjected to bamboo torture. Whether Anderson could have got away with such a move on television is a moot point. This was a children's series, after all. But Chinese Bamboo torture became something of an urban myth following World War Two. If you don't want to know what it is, please go straight to the next paragraph, but the victim would be strapped to the forest floor, on top of a bed of freshly planted bamboo seeds. Legend has it that the bamboo would grow and eventually penetrate the body, unless the victim confessed all. If you have a spare hour (or three), you can find out more about this fascinating tradition and whether it was fact or fiction by using our old friend, the Internet.

The art in 'Superjunk' not might have been as lush as say 'The Haunting Of Station 17', but it's a lively and action-packed read. The artist who worked on this particular story was Gerry Embleton, who had taken over drawing duties from his brother Ron. It is still a thrilling read though, and as action-packed as any of the television episodes. In many ways, Superjunk is one of the finest comic strip series. The story itself has not dated. If anything, the story is more potent today than it has ever been.

Sadly, many of the other stories are either missing or incomplete. What remains is a tantalising glimpse of British comics at their very best.

While some of the clunkier aspects of the Supermarionation process have aged better than others, the fast-moving comic adventures of Stingray has held up surprisingly well. A million school children were not wrong.

Attention Marineville. It's time again to stand by for action. Anything could happen in the next half hour! ●

ALL ART BY RON EMBLETON

AND IT'S LEAKING!
BUT THE TERROR FISH HAS ALSO LOCATED TROY...
MISSILE STANDBY... RANGE TWO HUNDRED MARINE YARDS...
READY TO FIRE!
I'VE GOT A SOUNDING, TROY.
YEAH... I THINK I CAN SEE IT STRAIGHT AHEA
BUT WHERE EXA ARE THEY?
THAT LOOKS LIKE THE BRIG OF AN OL SAILING VESSEL BE OF THOSE IN TH OF THE PRISO
OH, NO..!

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A D V E R T I S E M E N T

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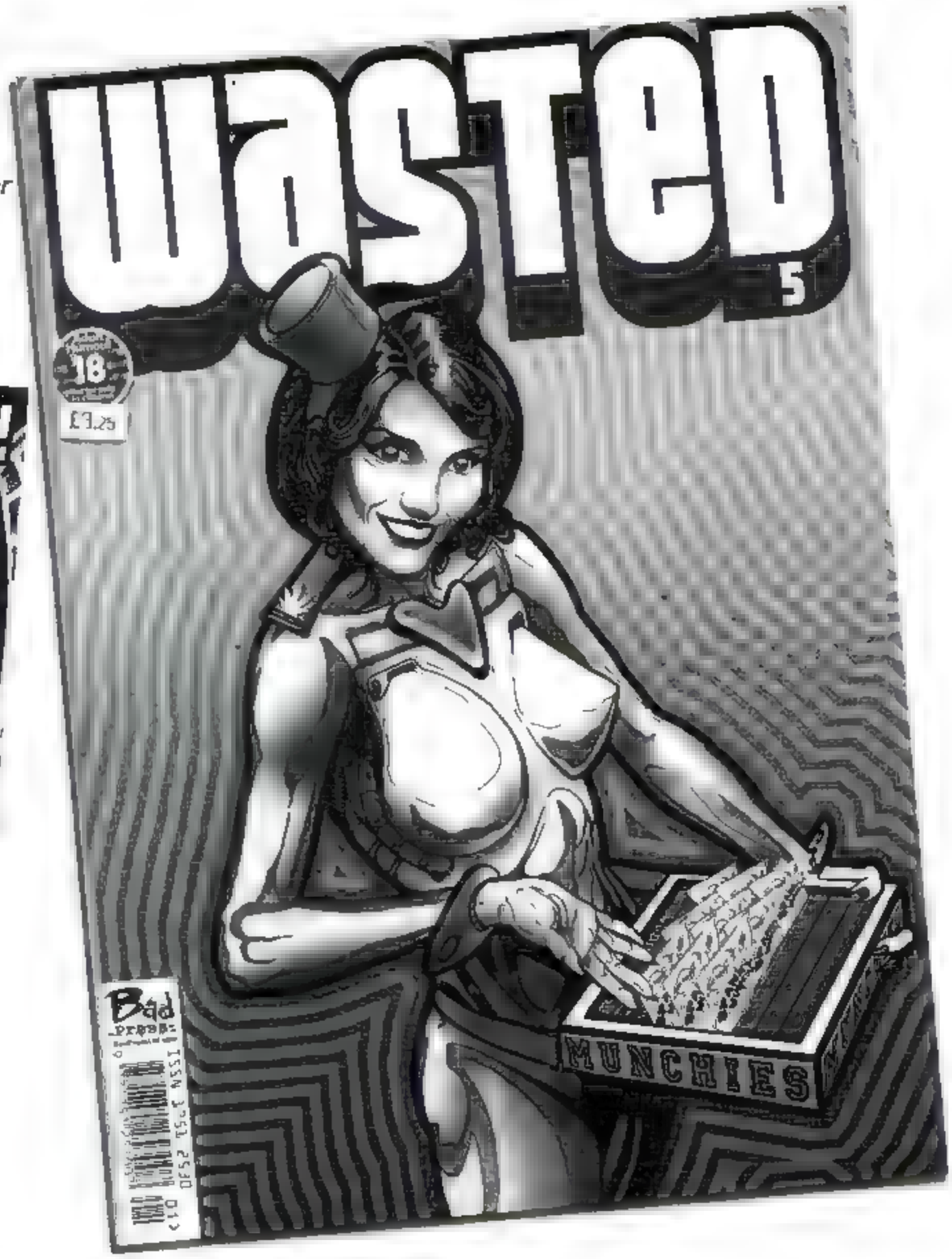


War wears many different faces and uniforms. So many in fact that it can become a little confusing ... so what's the deal with our favourite Genetic Infantryman, the blue-skinned Rogue Trooper? Crikey! *investigates a possible war crime ...*

TFFRIDAY:

THE STORY OF THE 'OTHER' ROGUE TROOPER

BY TONY INGRAM

In *2000AD* #650, in October 1989, Rogue Trooper first exploded into the pages of the Galaxy's Greatest Comic and a legend was born, courtesy of writer Dave Gibbons and artist Will Simpson.

Well, a minor legend, anyway.

Well, a strip, anyway.

"Wait a minute Ingram", I hear you cry, "what on Nu-Earth are you wittering on about? We already know about Rogue Trooper - and he wasn't created by Dave Gibbons and Will Simpson, and he certainly debuted long before 1989! Are you finally going senile?" Well, no - it's true that Rogue Trooper, last of the Genetic Infantrymen and his 'Biochip Buddies' Gunnar, Helm and Bagman were all created by writer Gerry Finlay Day and the aforementioned Mr Gibbons (originally the strip's artist) in *2000AD* #228, back in 1981. And he'd had a good run, for the most part. But eventually his strip had lost direction and finally been concluded in a *2000AD Sci-Fi Special* in summer 1989, with Rogue walking off into the wilderness to die and the three Biochips finally regened (cloned, their minds downloaded into new bodies from the computer chips they had occupied since their first 'deaths') as

babies, newborns with no memories of the horrors they'd endured. By late 1989, Rogue Trooper the strip was apparently dead and buried. But *2000AD* wouldn't let it lie - hence the subject of this article!

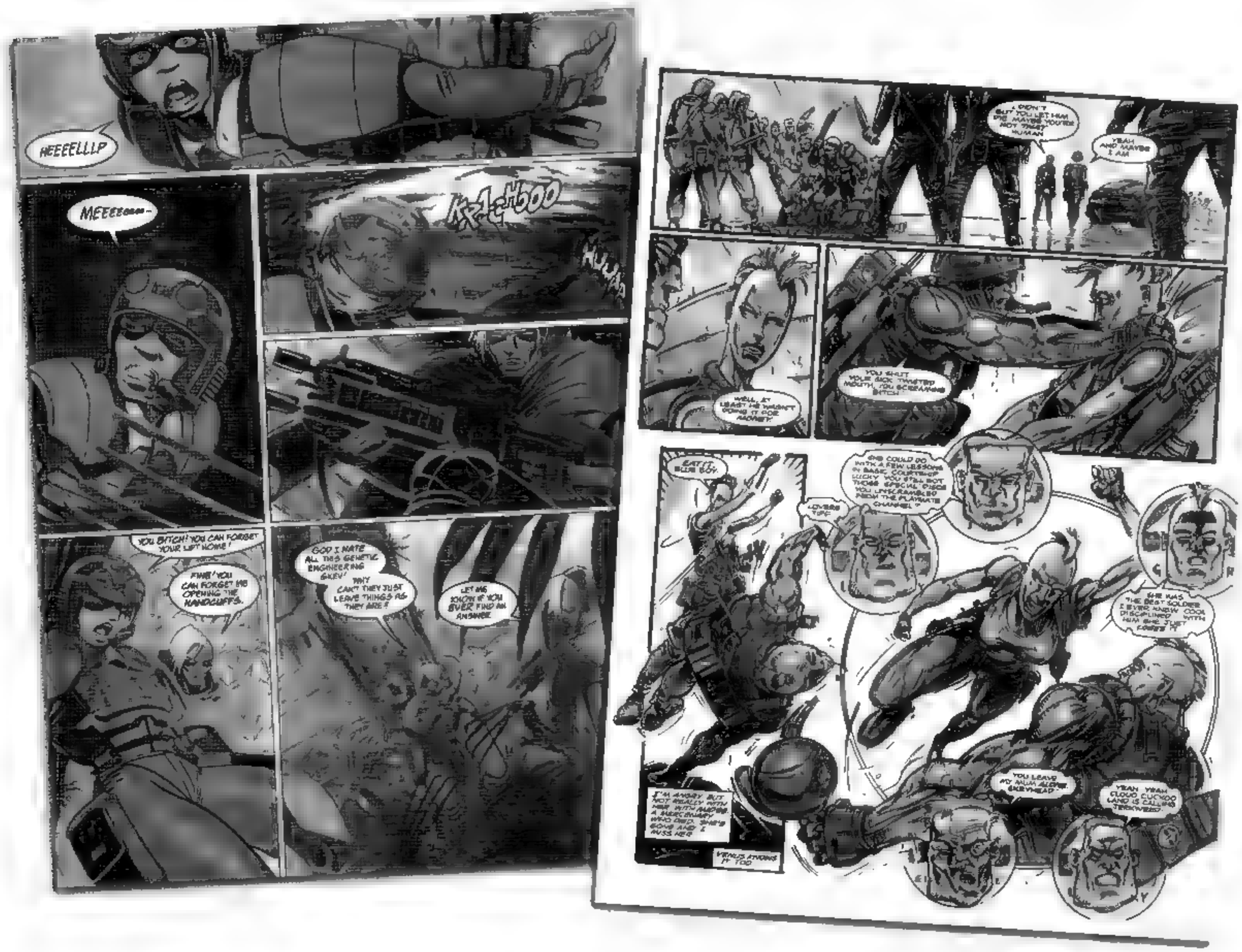
Gibbons had left the strip years before, but was now asked to return and revamp Rogue Trooper, a concept the comics' editor felt still had potential. With the old Rogue's story told, Gibbons - who was initially intended to write as well as draw the strip, though time constraints eventually caused another artist to be brought aboard - was freed from the constraints of nearly a decade of continuity, to reboot the character completely. Which he promptly did by...well, basically rehashing the original plot, with certain revisions! In the original story, the Genetic Infantry had been wiped out in the Quartz Zone Massacre on the toxic Hell of Nu-Earth, only one surviving; Rogue, who slotted the Biochips containing the personalities of his dead comrades Helm, Gunnar and Bagman into slots in his helmet, rifle and backpack respectively, and went AWOL to track down the Traitor General who had caused the massacre. In the new series, the setting was still Nu-Earth (though a rather less hostile Nu-Earth; in the original series only the GI's could even breathe the polluted air) but the massacre which killed the GI's was on >

Hill 392. The sole survivor was a GI called Friday, effectively the new 'Rogue trooper', out to discover why his creators the Clavell Corporation and their AI (artificial intelligence) satellite 'Highside' have apparently betrayed him and his colleagues. Disliking the Biochips, Gibbons dispensed with them in the new version; instead, Friday would simply carry mementos of three of his dead comrades, squad leader Top's helmet, Lucky's backpack and mad marksman Eightball's rifle. Artist Will Simpson played with the character's look, removing the original's rather dated Mohican haircut (which later resurfaced) and giving him a more military look. And the saga continued, with the 'new Rogue' usually up to his ears in trouble just as his predecessor had been. Continuity between the two versions was non existent, it seemed. New era, new Rogue Trooper.

Unfortunately, things were not to stay quite that simple. Gibbons and Simpson left the strip after concluding the first, epic storyline 'The War Machine' in 1990, and writer Michael Fleisher and a rotating crew of artists (Ron Smith, Simon Coleby and then Chris Weston) took over chronicling Friday's adventures, but the response to them was not as enthusiastic as expected. The morose, humourless Friday, it seemed, just lacked that certain something which had made Rogue a hit! Eventually, in 1994 Steve White took over as writer and began addressing some of the series' perceived problems, notably the confusion as to whether Friday actually had any connection to the original Rogue, and the readers' anger that he seemingly didn't. The Biochips were already back, courtesy of Fleisher who had introduced an alien called the 'Scavenger of Souls' who basically collected the minds of dead warriors and stored them on chips; coincidentally, amongst his collection Friday had found Top, Lucky and Eightball, who now occupied the same places in his equipment as their predecessors had in Rogue's (Eightball's mind had been damaged by the transfer leaving him with a childlike mentality, a nod to the old series continuity in which Bagman had been occasionally a little unstable). But White went further; in 1995, in a story entitled 'Blue on Blue' he had Friday, who had honestly believed himself to be the last GI, come face to face with five more of them-the regened Gunnar, Helm and Bagman, female 'GI Doll' Venus Blue Genes...and the original Rogue Trooper!

White's solution to the problem was ingenious, if convoluted. There were, it seemed, not one but two 'Nu-Earth's', separated by half a galaxy. Rogue's Nu Earth, the world permanently embroiled in the war between Norts and Southers, was one, while Friday's world (planet four sigma three) was another - but the Clavell Corporation, weapons

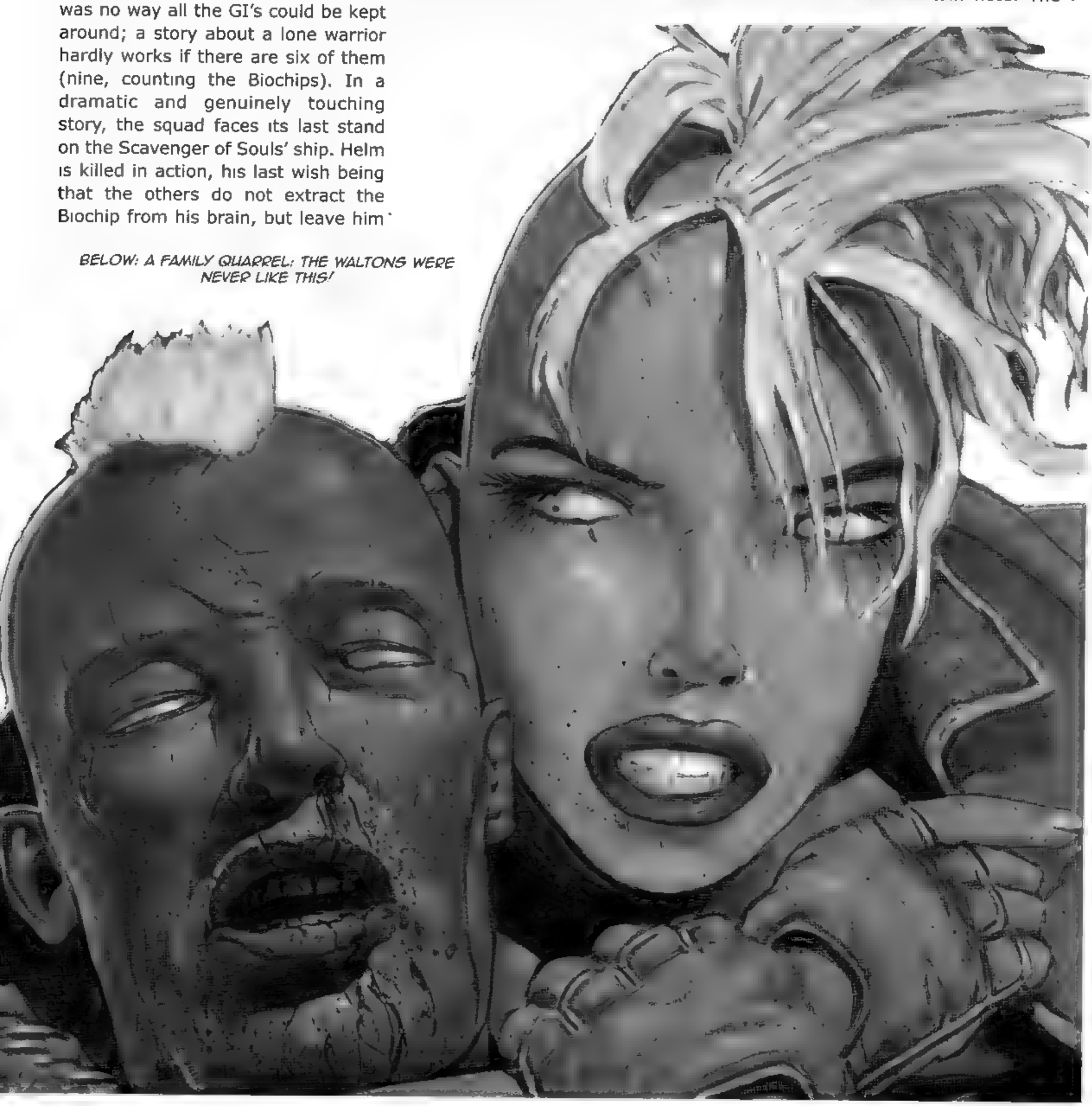
BELOW: SOLO ACTION WITH VENUS BLUE GENES


HEEEELLLP
MEEEEeeee...
KRAKOOO
KUUAA
YOU BITCH! YOU CAN FORGET YOUR LIFT HOME!
FINE! YOU CAN FORGET ME OPENING THE HANDCUFFS.
GOD I HATE ALL THIS GENETIC ENGINEERING SHIT! WHY CAN'T THEY JUST LEAVE THINGS AS THEY ARE!
LET ME KNOW IF YOU EVER FIND AN ANSWER
I DON'T BUT YOU LET HIM DIE MAYBE YOU'RE NOT THAT HUMAN
YEAH AND MAYBE I AM
WELL, AT LEAST HE WASN'T DOING IT FOR MONEY!
YOU SHUT YOUR SICK TWISTED MOUTH, YOU SCREAMING BITCH!
EAT IT BLUE GUY!
LOVERS TIFF
SHE COULD DO WITH A FEW LESSONS IN BASE, COURTESY OF LUCKY YOU STILL BOOT THOSE SPECIAL DISCS YOU UNSCRAMBLED FROM THE PLAYMATE CHANNEL?
SHE WAS THE BEST SOLDIER I EVER KNEW. COOL DISCIPLINED WITH HIM SHE JUST LOVES IT
I'M ANGRY BUT NOT REALLY WITH HER. WITH AMPHA A MERCENARY WHO DIED. SHE'S GONE AND I MISS HER
VENUS ATHONG IT TOO
YOU LEAVE MY MUM ALONE, SKRYHEAD!
YEAH YEAH CLOUD CUCKOO LAND IS CALLING TERRYWEED!

manufacturers, had if not engineered then certainly manipulated the wars on both worlds! Rogue's GI's were the original versions, Friday and his comrades a later batch. And Rogue and his crew had discovered this and come looking for payback! (curiously, the one point White never clarified was how the three regened GI's had grown to adulthood so quickly and why they had their memories back when they'd last been seen as infant blank slates)

Unfortunately, White's explanation left some readers feeling that the retcon had cheapened the original series somehow. And of course, there was no way all the GI's could be kept around; a story about a lone warrior hardly works if there are six of them (nine, counting the Biochips). In a dramatic and genuinely touching story, the squad faces its last stand on the Scavenger of Souls' ship. Helm is killed in action, his last wish being that the others do not extract the Biochip from his brain, but leave him to finally die in peace; Gunnar too is killed, but his is a 'never say die' personality, so his chip is extracted and slotted back into his beloved rifle, leaving him an electronic intelligence once again. Friday and Venus escape before the ship is destroyed, but in a poignant final scene, Rogue and Bagman face the end together, staring out at the stars wistfully before being blown to smithereens. Gunnar and Venus remained as links with the old strip (indeed, Venus even got her own occasional spinoff series) with Friday now armed with Gunnar and Venus carrying the confused Eightball (who believed she was his mother). The series continued much as before, though like the original strip it soon appeared to be losing direction. White's writing was fine, the art (now by the likes of Henry Flint and Steve Tappin) often exceptional, but Rogue Trooper - any Rogue Trooper-needs a quest, a motive for fighting. With Clavell out of the picture, Friday now had none. He was simply a galactic mercenary. Eventually, Steve White and co-writer Dan Abnett had the characters caught up in a story about a galaxy wide religious war with a group of fanatics called the Karvanu, which ended on an uncertain note. The >

BELOW: A FAMILY QUARREL: THE WALTONS WERE NEVER LIKE THIS!



Biochips fell into the hands of the enemy, and while we never learned the fates of Gunnar, Top and Lucky, in a harrowing scene Eightball is effectively tortured to death,. the confused AI bombarded with mental horrors until his mind simply shuts down. Venus' fate, too, was left uncertain, while the very last episode of 'Rogue Troopers' in *2000AD* #1022 (1996) ended with poor old Friday basically falling into a black hole. We never did find out how the war ended or whether our heroes survived and saved the day or not. The revamped Rogue Trooper had ultimately been deemed a failure it seemed, and Friday has never yet returned. Few tears were shed for his apparent passing.

And yet, that isn't where the story ends! In *2000AD* #1033 (1997) a new series began. It was called 'Mercy Heights', and was basically a kind of 'Casualty' in space-a soap opera/drama set on a space hospital. It featured an intriguing ensemble cast, and just as the long running TV drama I just mentioned had a regular in ambulance driver Josh, so Mercy Heights had a space ambulance pilot amongst its cast. This character, seemingly always on duty and always wearing his space helmet, was a blue skinned war veteran named Tor Cyan, whose dry wit made him a readers favourite despite his initially appearing to be purely a background character. Until that is, in one otherwise unremarkable episode, we happened to see him without his helmet-and noticed that he had a rather familiar Mohican haircut. Tor Cyan was a GI! Prog 2000, effectively the *2000AD* 'Annual' for the year 2000, proved even more intriguing: in a one off strip entitled 'Remembrance Day', Tor Cyan returned to Nu-Earth, centuries after the war there had ended (in a touching final splash panel we see that the once devastated world is now a peaceful, clear skied paradise filled with war graves and bright blue poppies) to pay his respects to his dead forebears, and reviews a holographic record of the original Rogue Trooper's life. Before leaving the 'museum', Cyan places a memento on a control panel: a buckled and ruined Biochip inscribed with the number 4 (Helm had been 1, Gunnar 2 and Bagman 3) and a name: Rogue! But if Rogue had died in an explosion in space, how could his Biochip have survived? As time went on, Cyan progressed to his own spinoff series in 2001. Eventually, we would learn that Rogue's remains had been found and regenerated by an alien creature called Rahab-cloned, if you like. Tor Cyan effectively was the Rogue Trooper, or at least a genetic duplicate of him! The Tor Cyan series ended with that story though, with *2000AD* #1299 in 2002, and Tor has not been seen since.

In prog #1301, just two weeks later, we were back on Nu-Earth once again, but this time with the original Trooper in a flashback story by Gordon Rennie (*2000AD* did something similar with Strontium Dog, whose adventures continue even now as effectively flashback episodes set before his death). More flashbacks followed in the next year or two, though Rogue hasn't been seen for awhile, now. In 2004, Rennie

BELOW LEFT: THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF GI DOLL RAFE. BELOW RIGHT, A FINAL GOODBYE FROM TOR CYAN

JUDGE DREDD
FUTURE SHOCKS
THE 86ERS
A.B.C. WARRIORS
PROG 1480
2000 AD
NEW THRILL!!
FIGHT OR FLIGHT
JOIN THE 86ERS FOR A BATTLE BEYOND THE STARS
ON EARTH, A YEAR LATER
THERE'S NO BIGGER PLACE
ALL CORRUPT EARTH!
BUT THE ANSWER WAS HERE, AFTER ALL WHERE WE FOUGHT, AND WHERE HIS FRIENDS STILL LIE.
HE WAS RIGHT THE ANSWER WAS ON THE CHIP
HE DIED A LONG TIME AGO BUT THE LAST G.I. SURVIVED
IN LEGEND IN LEGACY AND IN ONE MOOD

stated in an interview that he had wanted to revamp Rogue again but permission was refused and it seems that now, though other characters from Rogue's universe may continue to appear (such as female GI Rafe in currently ongoing series 'The 86er's, also by Rennie') it is not likely that "the Rogue Trooper character" will be seen again.

So, just where does that leave Tor Cyan, or for that matter the cast of the ultimately abortive revamped Rogue Trooper strip? Will we ever learn what happened to Venus Blue Genes? Are Top, Lucky and Gunnar still sitting in a cupboard somewhere, waiting for a call to arms that will never come? We may never know. But *2000AD* editorials view of the whole situation-and Gordon Rennie's-seems best summed up by one panel at the end of that first Rogue flashback episode in *2000AD* #1301. In it, we see an iconic image of the classic Rogue by artist Staz Johnson, standing in front of a tank-like vehicle, having just performed a heroic rescue. On the front of the tank is some graffiti; a purely incidental detail.

It reads simply "Thank God it's not Friday"... ●

SCRIPT: STEVE HOOKER ART: GLENN B FLEMING

MAGIC AL'S ADVENTURES IN HOLLYWOOD LAND

AN OFFICE SOMEWHERE IN HOLLYWOOD...

'SWATCHMAN TWO: THE REVENGE OF JACK SPARROW.'.

DO YOU REALLY WANT MY NAME ON THIS?

HAS THE PAST TAUGHT YOU NOTHING?

I'M TIRED OF BEING CAUGHT UP IN THE TANGLE OF YOUR STUPIDITY...

AL? MAY I CALL YOU AL?

NO. YOU CAN'T CALL ME AL.

BUT, PAUL SIMON SAID I COULD...

'MR MOORE' WORKS FOR ME JUST FINE.

AH, NO AL, YOU WORK FOR US. THAT'LL BE YOUR CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATION HERE

CONTRACT

YOU BRITS ARE SO UP TIGHT. CHILL-LAX, AL. SWATCHMAN TWO HITS ALL THE DEMOGRAPHICS FOR SELLING POPCORN AND PORN. YOU'LL BRING IN THE FANBOYS. THEY'LL WATCH SWATCHMAN TWO OVER AND OVER AGAIN. YOU CAN'T DENY THEM THE RIGHT TO WATCH UNTIL THEY DROP, RIGHT?'

I'M NOT HAPPY WITH THE NAME CHANGE EITHER OR THE TIE IN WITH THAT PIRATE TRILOGY. WHAT, FOR GOD'S SAKE WAS WRONG WITH CALLING IT 'WATCHMEN TWO'?

AL, BABY, YOU HAVE TO MOVE WITH THE TIMES. KEEP UP WITH THE TRENDS. YOU DIG? PRODUCT PLACEMENT, MY MAN. WHICH IS WHY WE'D ALSO LIKE TO DISCUSS 'V FOR VIENETTA' AND 'FROM HULL'. YOU HIP TO THAT, DADDY-O?

BESIDES, AL, BABY, WE CUT ALL THAT PIRATE CRAP FROM THE FIRST MOVIE; DON'T YA WANT IT BACK IN? YO HO HO AND A BOTTLE OF RUM?

BOX OFFICE GOLD, AL, BOX OFFICE GOLD... AL?

CONTRACT

LATER THAT WEEK, SOMEWHERE IN NORTHAMPTON...

CLICK!

IT'S A KIND OF MAGIC

Crikey!

♪♪ I CAN CALL YOU BEDDY AND BEDDY YOU CAN CALLLL MEEE AAALL... ♪♪

CLICK!

♪♪ UNFORGETTABLE... ♪♪ THAT'S WHAT YOU ARE...

JUST A MATTER OF TIME, I SUPPOSE...

Crikey!

SWATCHMEN CONTRACT

THE END!

SPOOF SPOOKS ON-THE-LOOSE

BY JOHN DEVANEY

PART THREE

The immense popularity of comic spookdom, as described in the previous two instalments of this article, reached a shrieking crescendo during the 1970s which continued well into the 1980s. A curious physical manifestation of this ethereal craze is the ever-present free pair of plastic vampire fangs which were inevitably attached to the covers of first issue comics such as Krazy No.1 (1976); Scream No.1 (1984); and It's Wicked No.1 (1989). Except for the likes of 'Snackula' (1985-86), such fangs made eating rather cumbersome! There was, of course, a 'Spookie Cookie' (Cracker 1975-76) taking care of the catering arrangements for the overworked throng of famished phantom diners. Corporeally challenged characters such as 'Boney'(Knockout 1971-73), an escapee from Brian Walker's 'Scream Inn', were naturally impervious to these gore-met delights. Jellied bat's eyes were always to be found on the stomach-churning menu at The Really Ghastly Family's household. There was a veritable feast of supernatural fun to be had at the comic strip table and kids everywhere were gorging themselves, 'Hungry Horace' style, on the ghoulish goodies on offer.

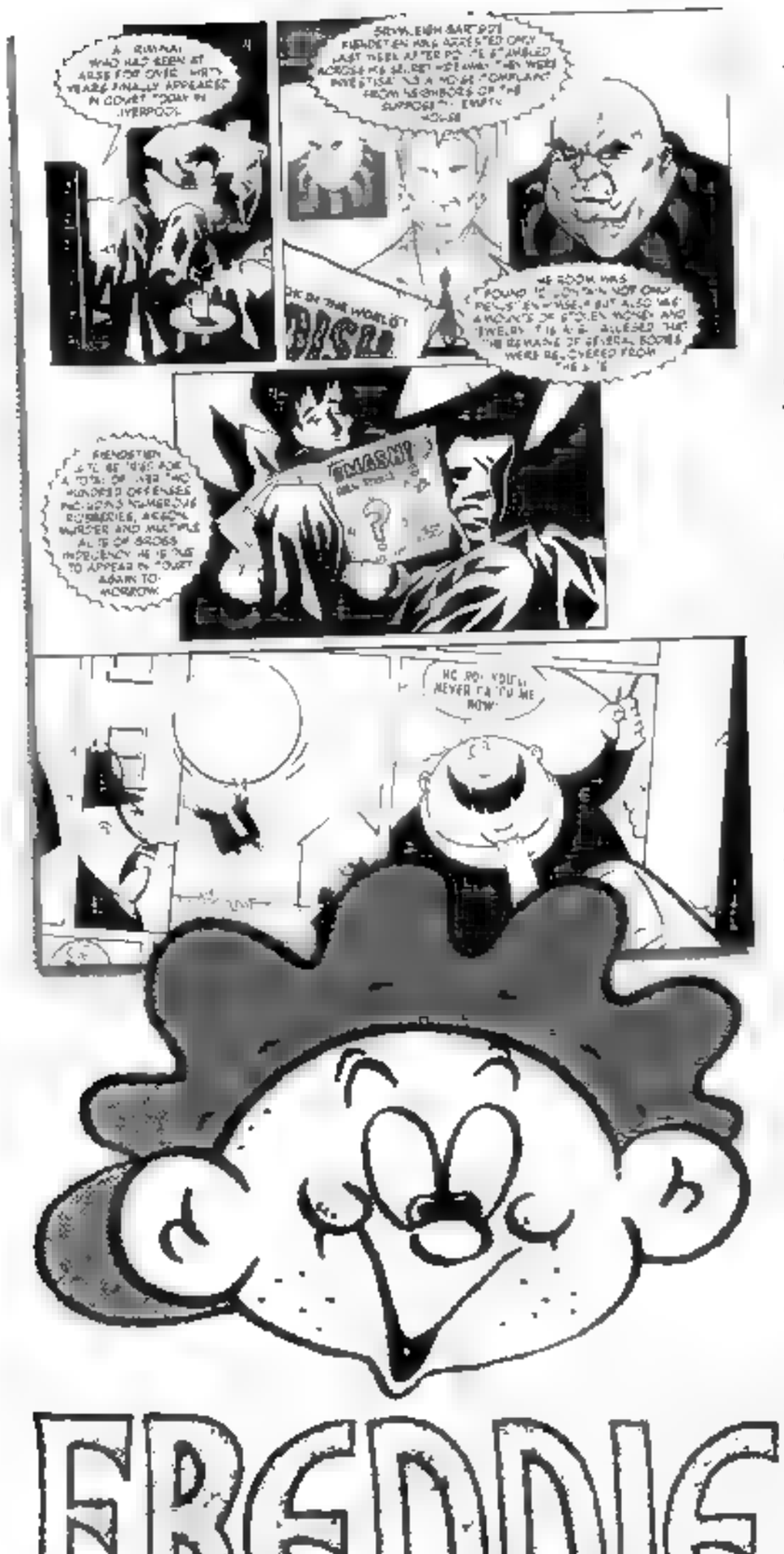
Generally, during this peak period of scarification fun, DCT tended to cautiously follow, with echoing footsteps, IPC's spook lead. Murray Ball's 'Ghostly Manor' (Topper 1974-77), for example, was re-exploring familiar 'Harry's Haunted House' territory but with a more engaging retinue of ogres and headless ragamuffins. 'To the manor dead' and similar torturous puns come immediately to mind and the comic strip storylines were, indeed, generally not averse to ending on a dire, cringe-worthy, punster note. Children naturally love such wacky wordplay so it is not surprising that it became a defining characteristic of British comic culture. As an adult, it is the unrelentingly groan-inducing puns, full of fearsome flummery, which strike sheer terror in the 'funny bone' of those who once prematurely buried themselves under the blankets to escape those imagined Grimly Feendish apparitions. Despite IPC's predominance, eerie beasties could occasionally be found crawling out from under the DCT drawing boards (Sparky's 'Thingummy Blob' is a strangely amorphous example) but it was primarily IPC who wholeheartedly promoted the spook cause of turning scared grimaces into cheeky smiles.

The two pre-eminent, cheerily chilled, comics of this era were IPC's Shiver & Shake and Monster Fun (later to merge with Buster) which were largely devoted to spookdom in all its hoary-humoured glory. Essentially, they were tapping into the juvenile fascination with make-believe horror and 'things that go bump in the night'; gleefully mocking the popular cinematic evocations which were the stuff of childhood nightmares. From 'Little 'Orror' (Cracker 1975-76) to big horror in Robert Nixon's 'Kid Kong' (Monster Fun 1975-76; Buster 1976-81), these diverse comic creations provided a cathartic inversion of fear into laughter. Instead of "Frankenstein meets Wolfman" we had 'Frankie Stein meets Freddie Fang'. The Loch Ness Monster had become 'Soggy The Sea Monster'. "Dracula's Daughter" had morphed into 'Draculass'. The fang-filled permutations, and 'Wiz War' spells, seemed endless. Halloween was, in fact, celebrated every week in those days as we turned the cobwebbed 'Webster' pages onto yet another helping of haunted house humour.

During the 1970s and 1980s, an exceptionally prolific purveyor of spookdom gained prominence: Reg Parlett (1904-1991). He had been a regular comic strip artist for the Amalgamated Press since the 1930s and made a name for himself with his quirky renditions of Charlie Chaplin for Funny Wonder and 'Big Hearted Arthur (Askey)' in Radio Fun. Reg simplified his style for his later work; particularly when it came to the ubiquitous bedsheet spooks of 'Harry's Haunted House' and 'Rent-A-Ghost Ltd.' These were just two of several ghost-garbed strips that were haunting the comic scene (as profiled in Part One). His familiar unfussy style seemed to make even the most baleful beastie appear rather cute and unthreatening. It was often the 'up-to-no-good' humans who appeared to be the real monsters in these strips and, in this respect, it is also rather curious that the 'hoodie' hoodlums, currently on the prowl, should choose to adopt Grim Reaper headgear to hide inside. Fright-is-right firms like 'Rent-A-Ghost Ltd' and 'Hire-A-Horror'(Cor 1970-74), which were guaranteed to have the baddies running for the hills, would certainly have a thriving business clearing the after dark streets of 21st century Britain!

When he was not wrapped-up in bedsheets, Reg was busy chasing the monster muse in bright-and-breezy strips such as 'The Mummy's Curse' (Whizzer & Chips 1969-70); 'Freddie Fang' (Cor 1970-74); and 'Bewitched Belinda' (Whizzer & Chips 1980-83). 'Creepy Comix' was a particularly inventive literal variation on the spooks-leaping-out-of-the-page theme which, appropriately, crept from comic-to-comic in the early 1980s (Wow 1982-83; Whoopee 1983-85; Whizzer & Chips 1986). Perhaps the weirdest of Reggie's creations was 'The Evil Eye' (Whoopee 1974-77); a levitating eyeball that possessed the supernatural power to influence people to act against their better natures. As with many of his comic strips, there was usually an ironic twist at the end of the tale when the expected evil outcome worked, surprisingly, in the victim's favour. A new twist on an old joke, which exemplifies the extent to which the spook spoof had become ingrained in comic culture, appeared on the cover of the newly merged Monster Fun & Buster; it featured Reggie's Rent-A-Ghost mob in a restaurant with the gag-line "Waiter, there's a skeleton in my soup!" 'Freddie The Fearless Fly' had finally been usurped. As if 'The Evil Eye' and 'The Hand' were not enough, levitating body parts reached absurd dimensions when Buster's 'The Ghostly Leg' gave the bullies a disembodied kick up the rear! This gets my vote as the nuttiest spook notion ever (although a 'ghostly nose' to sniff out trouble, and a 'ghostly finger' to pick it, would have been far worse!?).

Unlike Reg, Terry Bave, born in 1931, came to comics relatively late in life having followed a career as a professional cartoonist. At the age of 36, in 1967, he was engaged to work on Leo Baxendale's 'Eagle Spy Junior Spy' spin-off character Grimly Feendish in Wham until Leo took over when Grimly went solo in the back pages of Smash. In 1970, he was responsible for 'Jimmy Jeckle & Master Hyde' in Whizzer & Chips (1970-73); one of several Jekyll & Hyde junior psychodrama strips enacting jokey interpretations of >



the moral dilemmas of good/ bad boy behaviour (their thought balloons bursting with duplicitous discord). Ken Harrison's 'Jimmy Jinx' (Buzz 1973-75; Topper 1975-85) was a popular hexed example of this theme. Another affectionately remembered Terry Bave spook creation was 'Draculass' (Monster Fun 1975-76; Buster 1976); an apprentice juvenile Vampirella who, rather ineptly, got her virginal fangs stuck into most things aside from the warm juicy neck! Terry, together with artists such as Tom Paterson (see Part Two), kept their artistic teeth firmly embedded in the jocular jugular!

Many of these comic strips confirmed our worst suspicions about the real life frightful world surrounding us. Bullies, both old and young, were merely spoilt misanthropic 'Sweeny Toddlers' with a 'Faceache' complex. 'Grimly Feendish' criminality could be found squelching under the classroom floorboards as tuck-shop goodies were pilfered; pens went missing; and trainee graffiti artists went to work on the school desks. Many a callous teacher has cast 'The Evil Eye' and, as a result of this baneful influence, forceful learning through fear replaced the innate joys of knowledge through free enquiry. The oddball occupants of 'Strange Hill' and 'Creature Teacher' revealed, on a deeper level, how surreal and disorientating life in the classroom could be; especially for the sensitive impressionable child. Comic strips like these enabled us to laugh at the troubled tearaway times we lived through; safe in the knowledge that good will always eventually triumph over evil. This simplistic, but reassuring, moral stance is in stark contrast to the blatant moral bankruptcy of today's Viz-style 'Buster Gonad' testicular vicissitudes ('Ball Boy' for a perpetually pubescent generation who impart a cruder meaning to The 'Oddball' Syndrome!?).

Even junk mail, that life-draining force of capitalistic society, had a curiously unintentional allegory in the vampire postman 'Ghostman Bat' (It's Wicked 1989 UK Marvel) who delivered evil spirits through the letterbox every week. Creepy neighbours were hilariously lampooned in Graham Allen's 'Fiends & Neighbours' (Cor 1973-74; Buster 1974-76; Scream 1984). Mr and Mrs Jones die-hard 'ideal home' conventionality was sorely tested each week when confronted with The Really Ghastly Family's demonic domesticity. While Mrs Ghastly sported a bone-bun hairdo, Mr Ghastly was charmingly portrayed with his vulture-wing eyebrows and bald lobotomised head. Family outings were made on Hell's Angel Chopper motorbikes complete with Viking horn Nazi helmets while the Joneses, when not in tow, were content to hide at home with their Tupperware, genteel tea and toasted crumpets. ASBOs would have been utterly ineffectual on this lot although The Really Ghastly Family actually seem quite loveable compared to the rabidly dysfunctional 'Biffa Bacon' families of today.

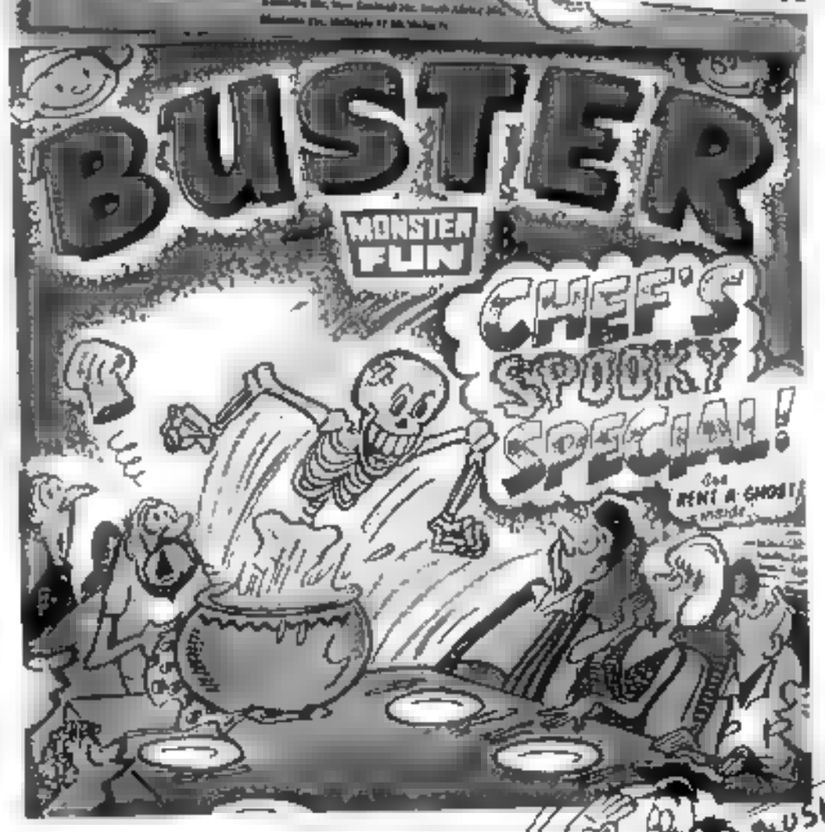
The irresistible lure of spookdom has never completely vanished from the scene. The popular Simpson comics, for instance, are annually awakened by the dead when the Halloween 'Treehouse of Horror' is

resurrected, yet again, for another round of celluloid-inspired spoofery. The visceral, 'grokingly' nihilistic, cityscape capers of Judge Dread often incorporate spook film noir elements as cultural reference points. As we saw in Part One, this continues the Mad magazine tradition of cinematic comic satire established by the exaggerated creepiness of Davis and Woods in the 1950s and 60s. It remains prevalent in the work of artists such as Drew Friedman whose weird B-Movie distortions of humanity frequently defy categorisation.

Alan Moore's six issue 'Albion' (Wildstorm 2005) deserves a special mention as an exceptionally broody and brilliant homage to the dark side of spook comic culture. This is a highly contemporary, socially relevant, reinterpretation of the once cosy familiarity of those yesteryear comic strip icons we knew and loved. They are transfigured, Penny Dreadful style, into monstrously mutated versions of their former identities. Albion is a disturbingly dystopic vision of humanity corrupted almost beyond recognition. Even technology, symbolised by a rusted and unloved Archie, no longer has the power to redeem it. Grim reality has, at last, caught up with the likes of depraved Grymleigh Gartside Fiendstein (and his squelchy accomplices). The undead matriarchal vampire from 'Fiends & Neighbours' is placed in charge of the dismal (uncaring) Care Home. The scrunging social outcast Fred Akeley has become the 'Faceache' for a loveless and lost 21st century world which has finally gone totally insane. The story ends with a psychotically deranged Captain Hurricane slugging it out with a Pitbull version of Pansy Potter and is eventually flattened by a grown-up, bad-assed, Kid Kong. The subliminal spooks are ferociously on-the-loose in Alan's psychologically scarred tribute to the bully boy bedlam of our youth. The days of playful innocence, according to this bleak perspective, are long gone.

Thankfully, the old comics are still here to remind us of that brighter optimistic time when life was young and the simple pleasures were the most rewarding. In the days before ipods and megadeath computer games, all we needed was a fresh comic and a sherbet dab to make it seem that all was well with the world. Those corny 'haunted house' comic creations have, ironically, now become friendly phantoms of a past that, in retrospect, represents a golden age of innocent creaking door humour.....a multi-panelled door, the stapled hinges rusted with age, opening onto an escapist knockabout world of loveably roguish characters forever emblazoned on our memories. With youth on our side, we learned to laugh in the face of our own mortality as we took a rollicking ride on the Whoopee 'Fun Fear' ghost train (dementedly driven by Brian Walker) and japed with the juvenile jesters from the afterlife. The inhabitants of this parallel comic universe continue to haunt our memories as they restlessly rattle their pun-linked chains.....for they know that one day we, too, will become ectoplasmically elected members of spooksville!

See you on the other side.....with Freddie Fang, the wolf cub, as our guide!! ●

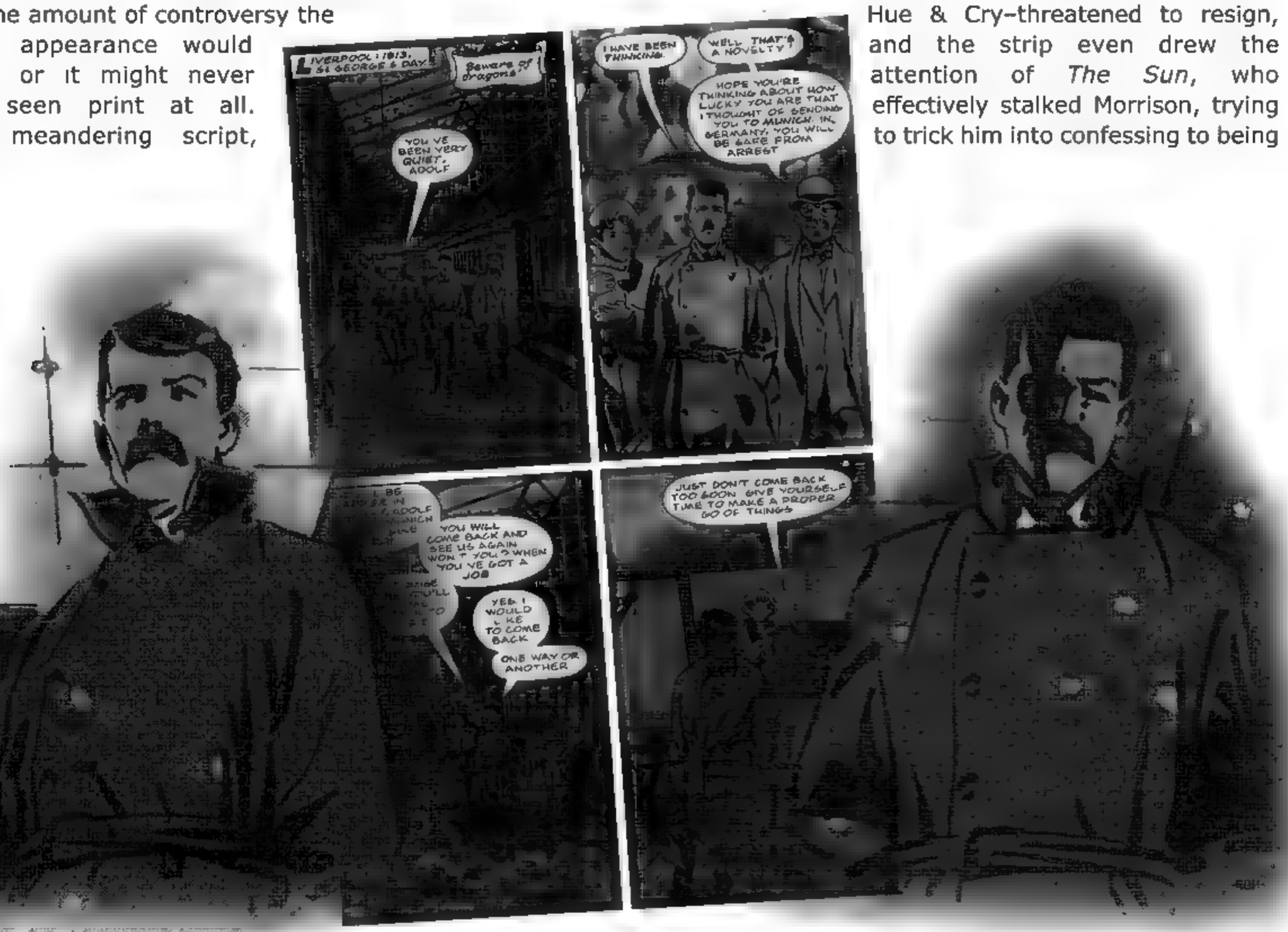


the new adventures of Hitler

There are some ideas you instinctively know are bad ones. In 1989, Grant Morrison and Steve Yeowell's instincts took a day off...

Created for the Scottish arts magazine 'Cut', the surreal *The New Adventures of Hitler* was loosely based on genuine claims by Adolf Hitler's sister-in-law that Hitler had briefly lived with her, her husband Alois (Hitler's half brother) and their son William in Liverpool from 1912-1913 (Bridget Hitler's claims have been largely discounted by historians, but have never actually been proven to be false). It's unlikely, however, that those concerned realized at the time the amount of controversy the strip's appearance would cause, or it might never have seen print at all.

The meandering script, concerning a melancholy Hitler trying vainly to make sense of his life and–perhaps a rather more challenging prospect–of the English, was not entirely serious in tone (at one point Hitler finds The Smiths' lead singer, Morrissey, hiding in his wardrobe and singing *Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now*) but oddly enough it still upset rather a lot of people who for some strange reason felt that a real life genocidal maniac was not an appropriate star for a supposedly humorous comic strip. I can't imagine why. Writer Grant Morrison was accused of being a Nazi, Pat Kane–one of the magazine's editors and the lead singer of the pop band Hue & Cry–threatened to resign, and the strip even drew the attention of *The Sun*, who effectively stalked Morrison, trying to trick him into confessing to being


LIVERPOOL: 1913. ST GEORGE'S DAY
Beware of dragons!
YOU'VE BEEN VERY QUIET, ADOLF
I HAVE BEEN THINKING.
WELL, THAT'S A NOVELTY!
HOPE YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT HOW LUCKY YOU ARE THAT I THOUGHT OF SENDING YOU TO MUNICH. IN GERMANY, YOU WILL BE SAFE FROM ARREST
YOU WILL COME BACK AND SEE US AGAIN WON'T YOU? WHEN YOU'VE GOT A JOB
YES, I WOULD LIKE TO COME BACK
ONE WAY OR ANOTHER
JUST DON'T COME BACK TOO SOON. GIVE YOURSELF TIME TO MAKE A PROPER GO OF THINGS

a Nazi sympathizer. Morrison, for his part, was quite clear on what the point of the strip was: he was attempting to show that even a monster like Hitler had started out as an ordinary man with an ordinary life, a warning that we should all be on guard against the darker sides of our own natures. It seems this message was unfortunately either misunderstood or ignored by his detractors, but the strip–though bizarre in the extreme–was successful in painting Hitler in a new light. He is portrayed as a rather sad and confused figure, lost in a country he finds incomprehensible (he speaks no English, which doesn't help), continually badgered by his sister-in-law to "get a job, learn a trade" and regarded as a nuisance by his half brother, who sees him as a waster. At one point Alois, a salesman, launches into an impassioned speech about safety razors being the coming thing and there being one in every home in the future, which curiously echoes Hitler's later speeches about world domination; Alois even ends up gesturing with his razor in a manner evocative of a Nazi salute. Meanwhile, the downtrodden Adolph is haunted by what seem to be hallucinations of a foul individual calling himself John Bull, evidently some sort of personification of Britain accompanied by an incontinent bulldog (the symbolism isn't exactly subtle), who goads him into believing he has some great destiny and is on the trail of the Holy Grail. Hitler eventually believes he has found the grail, in reality a stinking, blocked toilet, and is finally shipped off to Germany by his extended family, reinvigorated and promising himself that he will one day return to Liverpool–by implication, to exact revenge. The series was reprinted in the short lived, adult orientated *2000AD* spin-off *Crisis* magazine (issues #46-49) in 1990, and the titles publishers, Fleetway, apparently intended to issue it as a collected edition at a later date. Curiously however, this collected edition has yet to appear, and an attempt by Morrison to get his own publishing imprint off the ground and reprint it amounted to nothing. Grant Morrison has since gone on to bigger and theoretically better things, as has artist Steve Yeowell. Hitler, however, has had no further new adventures since... ●

This is the house, number 102 Upper Stanhope Street, where I live with my half-brother Alois and Bridget, his wife.
PASS THE SALT, ADOLF.
Half-brother! Hah!
A ROOM WITH A VIEW...OOO AND YOU...OOO?
What a crazy language is English!
ARE YOU STILL HAVING TROUBLE WITH THE WARDROBE IN YOUR ROOM, ADOLF?
TROUBLE? WHAT TROUBLE IS THIS?
ADOLF TELLS ME THERE'S A MAN IN HIS WARDROBE.
AH.
YES, IT'S VERY STRANGE.
HE...SINGS TO ME, EVERY TIME I OPEN THE WARDROBE...
"...I WAS LOOKING FOR A JOB AND NOW I'VE FOUND A JOB AND HEAVEN KNOWS I'M MISERABLE NOW..."

STEVE YEOWELL'S MOODY STYLE CAPTURED A DISGRUNTLED ADOLPH STROLLING THE STREETS OF POST VICTORIAN LIVERPOOL...

I HAVE A VISION, ADOLF!
I SEE A VAST INTERNATIONAL SALES ORGANISATION, STRETCHING ACROSS EUROPE!
I SEE SAFETY RAZORS IN EVERY HOME!
IN EVERY TOWN!
IN EVERY COUNTRY!
I HAVE A VISION TOO.
HMMMM
Alois has hairy ears.
I covet them.

AND, WHILE I'M AT IT...

A column from Stephen Hooker– the second person to take a copy of Crikey! *on holiday!*

COMIC COLLECTORS v COMIC READERS - LET'S GET READY TO RUMBLE!!!!!

By and large (as I used to think of my Religious Studies teacher) UK comics have avoided the issue numbering malarkey and opted for the tryed and trusted custom of simply printing the date on the cover. And frankly, that's how I like it. Dates autheteinicate, might have been my mantra as a lowly civil servant back in the mid 90s.

Now I have the exceptional, although some, (Mrs Hooker amongst them), have said (shouted sometimes in fact) annoying, habit of needing to date everything, in every conversation I ever have (long before I became a civil servant in fact but not before I started reading UK comics). I think it's important to get the conversational timeline right; it's a mental strain too (in more ways than one way), but some one has to take up the slack! And mentally date punch it.

Mention a comic to me and I'll have to date it before the conversation can properly continue for me and, by extension, for you. I've heard it said that film director John Carpenter is the same with dates too, so he's in good company then.

So, UK comic publishers sensibly avoid the numbering fetish other comic publishers zealously pursue. Notably those from across the pond, for whom a first issue, No.1, boarders on the totally manic and lulls the naive buyer into a pointless spending spree of duplicate (investment?) first issues (or me, when I was 14, to be precise). I say by and large, because, in its hey day, Marvel UK imported the numbering trait to our shores, although with the compromise of the issue date printed on the cover along al well.

Which brings me to that thorny question: am I a comic collector or a comic reader? Do I just like to have a complete set of comics, number one owards, regardless of the art and writing, or do I just read comics that appeal. If said comic goes off the boil, I just drop it like a not so hot potato? Oh loyality, I hear your high pitched screams, well I'm loyal to my somewhat battered wallet (which, these days, sadly, my bank manager says he owns).

Consecutively numbered comics have stopped bothering me.

As has buying every issue ever published of a comic or trolling through countless back issue boxes, tongue poking out of my mouth, much like Benny Hill's Fred Scuttle, ever so slightly deviant, needing to find those issues that will complete an entire run and thus give my life less triviality and more meaning.

But I don't need to do that anymore.

There you are comic publishers, I am in control of my own habit. I luxuriated in my new found self control of picking up comics that appealed rather than the addictive thing of needing every issue regardless. I felt terribly smug for, oh, about five minutes. As you will see.

Recently, for research purposes, I found myself looking down the spines of some Valiant Annuals, acquired from eBay, thinking (not out load, as there were non comic collectors in the house - normal people I think they're called - and they were not likely to understand, or might think they understand only too well, and have me committed), I had the Valiant Annuals for 1971, 72 and 73 but then only 77 and 79. What I needed then and there was the missing years. yes a complete set, no gaps. Yes, my suddenly fevered mind rationalised out, that's what I need, consistency of years (or numbers, take your pick).

I had logged into eBay and clicked on my UK Annuals search (set up in case you see I needed to do er.....more research) and before I realised what was happening Valiant Annuals 74, 75, 76, 78 and 80, were mine, all mine. Today, one Valiant Annual, tomorrow the whole run (punctuate with manic laughter).

The bug had bitten and I had been totally powerless in its grip. I blamed eBay for flaunting itself at me in such an entrapping manner, denial's handy that way. However, the simple fact was I had been fooling myself. Sorry, there was a pause there while I checked eBay for the Valiant Annual 1981. Ah, wait a sec: 1982's has just been listed! Bear with me for a moment or two!

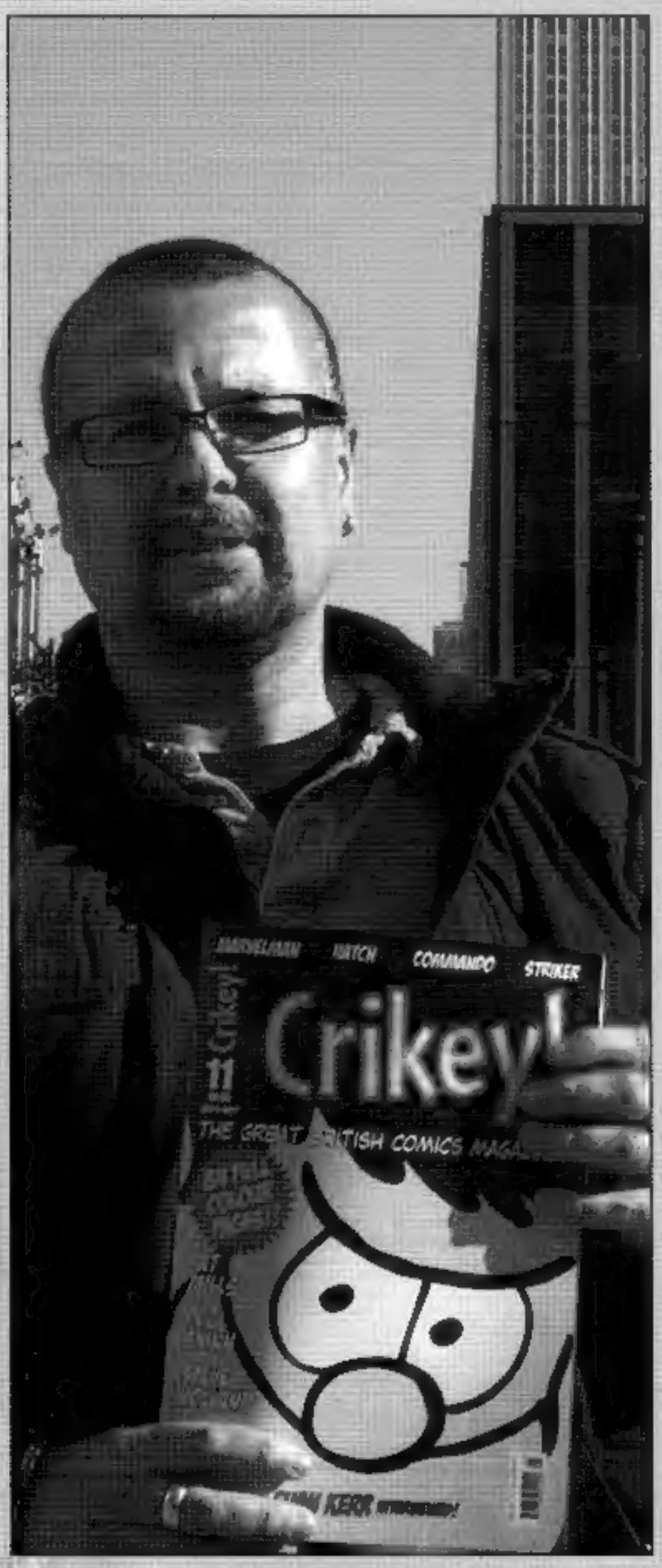
The question it does beg though is this: which one are you, collector of complete comic runs or a picker up of what comic looks interesting? Closely followed by which is best one to be? And maybe that's a question as pointless as who's better, Battler Britton or Paddy Payne, Microsoft or Apple (Apple by the way), IPC or D C Thomson?

So the bug can still bite.

Bite? That's an understatement! Does it ever really go away? This is, after all, comics, the writers, the artists, the characters, the stories, the panel progression; the sheer enjoyment of the physical form of printed ink on paper. No medium gets better than this.

And, in the end, does it matter? Collector or reader? Or, if you're like me, a bit of both. It's a big comic world out there and there's room for all of us. So, every time I see huge swathes of consecutive comics listed on eBay, I shed a genuine tear. My bank manager is never going to understand.

Let alone, feel my pain! ●



HATCH

BY GLENN B FLEMING

THE Crikey! SHED

BOMB

TNT

Bombs for DUMMIES

Crikey! 16 THE FINAL ISSUE!

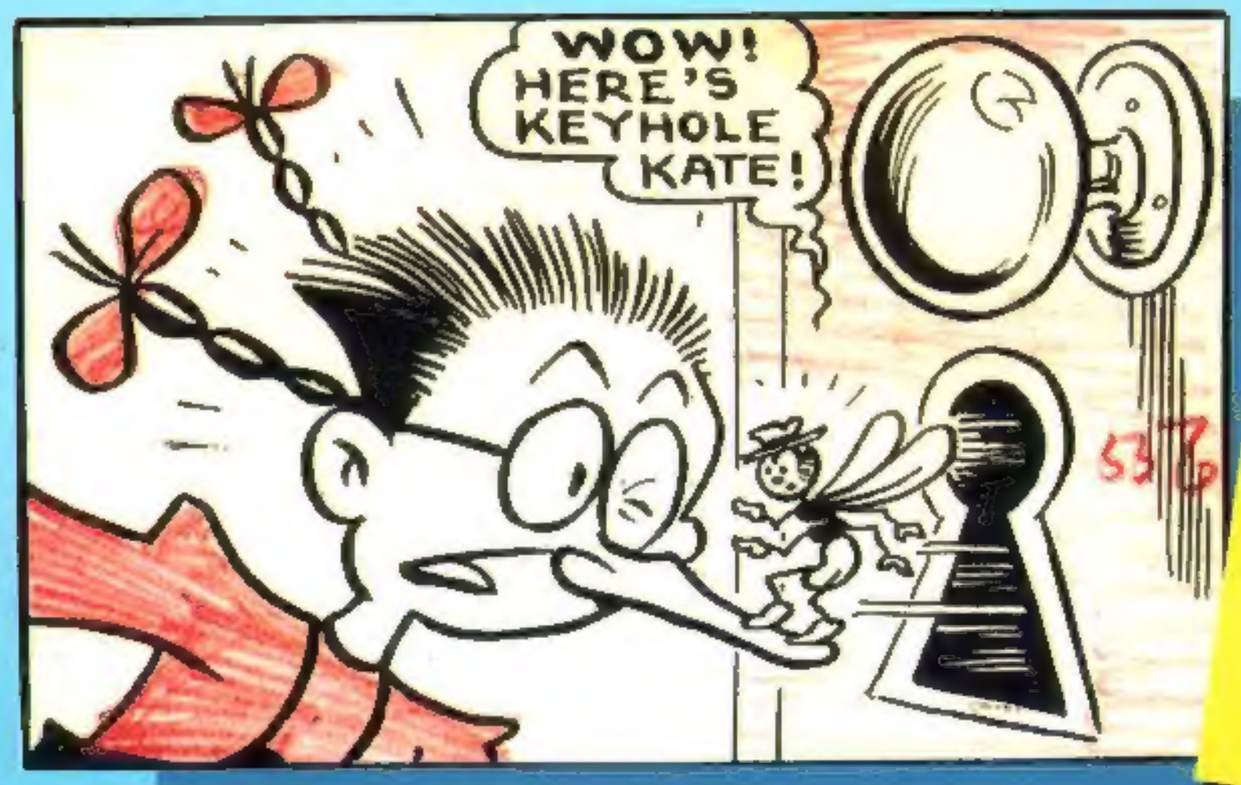
Guido Fawkes MY STORY

Black Holes DUMMIES

...THE END..?

Blasé and
UGLY DUCKLING PRESS
present...

COMIC ODD MENTS



THIS IS AN IRREGULAR FEATURE WHERE WE TAKE A LOOK AT SOME OF THE ODDMENTS AND ODDITIES THAT WE FIND WHILST LOOKING THROUGH THE HUGE AMOUNT OF VINTAGE MATERIAL THAT PASSES THROUGH OUR HANDS. WE THOUGHT YOU MIGHT LIKE TO HAVE A LOOK TOO. THIS TIME WE ARE LOOKING AT SOME RATHER QUAINT LITTLE COMIC CHARACTER CROSS-OVERS.

ABOVE: KEYHOLE KATE MEETS FREDDY THE FEARLESS FLY IN THIS *DANDY* STRIP BY HARRY BANGER FROM SEPTEMBER 1963. (PANEL TAKEN FROM THE ORIGINAL ARTWORK).

RIGHT: FROM *ILLUSTRATED CHIPS* WE HAVE SUNBEAM (BILLED AS "THE INNOCENT IMP") AND HER AUNT MEETING UP WITH HOMELESS HECTOR AND MOONLIGHT MOGGIE. IN THE BACKGROUND WE CAN SEE SMILER AND SMUDGE WHO APPEAR TO BE PAYING A VISIT FROM *THE BUTTERFLY* COMIC. (PANEL TAKEN FROM ORIGINAL ART).

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BELOW: NOW, HERE'S AN INTERNATIONAL CROSS-OVER! WHEN THE EDITOR OF THE SPANISH EDITION OF *CAPTAIN MARVEL* CAME TO RUN THIS STORY BACK IN 1948, WE THINK HE FOUND THAT OTHER FAWCETT CHARACTERS WERE MAKING GUEST APPEARANCES AND FIGURED HIS READERS WOULDN'T KNOW WHO THEY WERE. HE HAD THE STRIP PARTIALLY REDRAWN WITH CHARACTERS FAMILIAR TO SPANISH COMIC FANS. SO CAPTAIN MARVEL GOT TO MEET THE LONE RANGER, THE PHANTOM AND MANDRAKE THE MAGICIAN!

EL CAPITAN MARVEL
en La Hora del Radioyente
AVENTURA COMPLETA
1'50 PTS.
61 NYOKA EN EXPEDICION DE NOVATOS
WE'RE ALWAYS INTERESTED TO HEAR FROM ANYONE WHO HAS OLD COMICS ETC. FOR SALE! PLEASE CONTACT US SO THAT WE CAN MAKE YOU AN OFFER!

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